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Tastes of Italia

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010 VOLUME 10/NUMBER 5

Anacapri Secrets

32 Anacapri is the mountainous part of Italy's Isle of Capri, reached by ancient stone steps, and its culinary traditions reflect centuries of working the land and preparing its bounty of fruits and vegetables.
By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

Super Tuscans

50 The first Super Tuscan wine received a chilly reception from workers who didn't realize the wine needed to age a bit. Now these wines are prized—and pricey. Learn how you can find the best values.
By Patricia Thomson

Sicilian Style

56 Although Sicily is close to the Italian mainland, it has its own distinct cuisine. Fresh fish dishes abound, you'll see plenty of capers and pine nuts, and the dessert tables include cannoli and gelato.
By David Cohen

Tastes of Rome

38 When in Rome you should eat as the Romans do, and that includes olives, cheese, pasta, garlic, mushrooms, veal and fish. For centuries, some of the world's best chefs were brought to Rome to cook for the popes, and the city became known for its fine cuisine. If you can't get to Rome this weekend, we offer a selection of recipes like Halibut in a Parsley Sauce, Fettuccine al Burro, Artichoke Hearts in Garlic and Olive Oil, and Zucchini with Garlic and Chile.

By Tammy Minn

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Tastes of Italia
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010 VOLUME 10/NUMBER 5

Apple Season
17 An abundant fall harvest of apples leads to all kinds of possibilities, including pies, tarts, cakes, and cider. Or slice and serve with cheese.

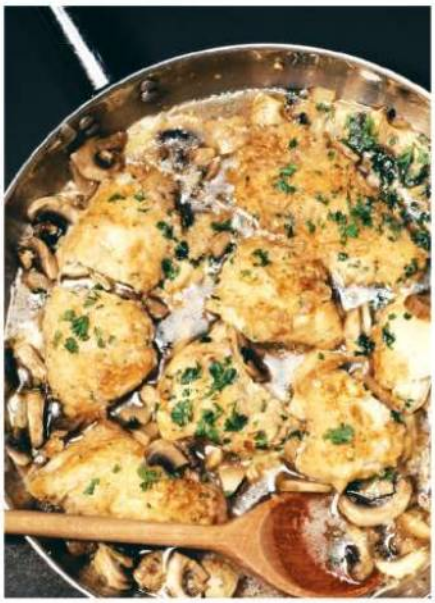
Grappa Grazie
18 Consider adding some of this fiery fruit-based brandy to your morning coffee or serve it after dinner as a digestive. A little goes a long way.

Leeks & Zucchini
20 Add leeks to soup, a savory tart, fall salad, or pasta. Zucchini can be used to stuff ravioli or the blossoms can be dipped in batter and fried. Also: Balsamic vinegar.

Bookshelf
22 Peruse these tantalizing new cookbooks from chefs and Italian food experts: *Cicciotti's Kitchen, Cook Italy, and The Italian Farmer's Table.*

Fall Classics
25 It's time to try Skillet Chicken with Garlic and Mushrooms, Creamy Zucchini Soup with Sun-Dried Tomatoes, and Roast Pumpkin Salad.

The Last Word
80 Sweet and Sour Yellow Pumpkin is another way to serve this versatile vegetable. Mary Ann Esposito explains just how to prepare it.



Cover: John Michael Laurence

Easy Sunday Dinner

33 The traditional leisurely Sunday dinner offers a chance to relax and savor good food and great company. It's one of the few times in the week when the pace slows a bit and you can spend more time at the table. Here's a collection of recipes for a dinner family and friends will enjoy: Fresh Green Salad with Pine Nuts and Parmesan; Roasted Beef Tenderloin in Chianti; Polenta with Butter and Cheese; and Apple Pie with Pecan Streusel Topping.

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Subscriptions & Newsstands (951) 682-3026, ext. 22

Vol. 10 No. 5 TASTES OF ITALIA (ISSN 1539-4743) is published bi-monthly by Sunwest Publishing, 3769 Tibbetts Avenue, Suite A, Riverside, CA 92506; (951) 682-3026. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Tastes of Italia, 3769 Tibbetts Avenue, Suite A, Riverside, CA 92506. Periodicals postage paid at Riverside, CA and additional mailing offices. Subscriptions, 6 issues for $24.95.

Printed in the U.S.A.

[TO REACH US]

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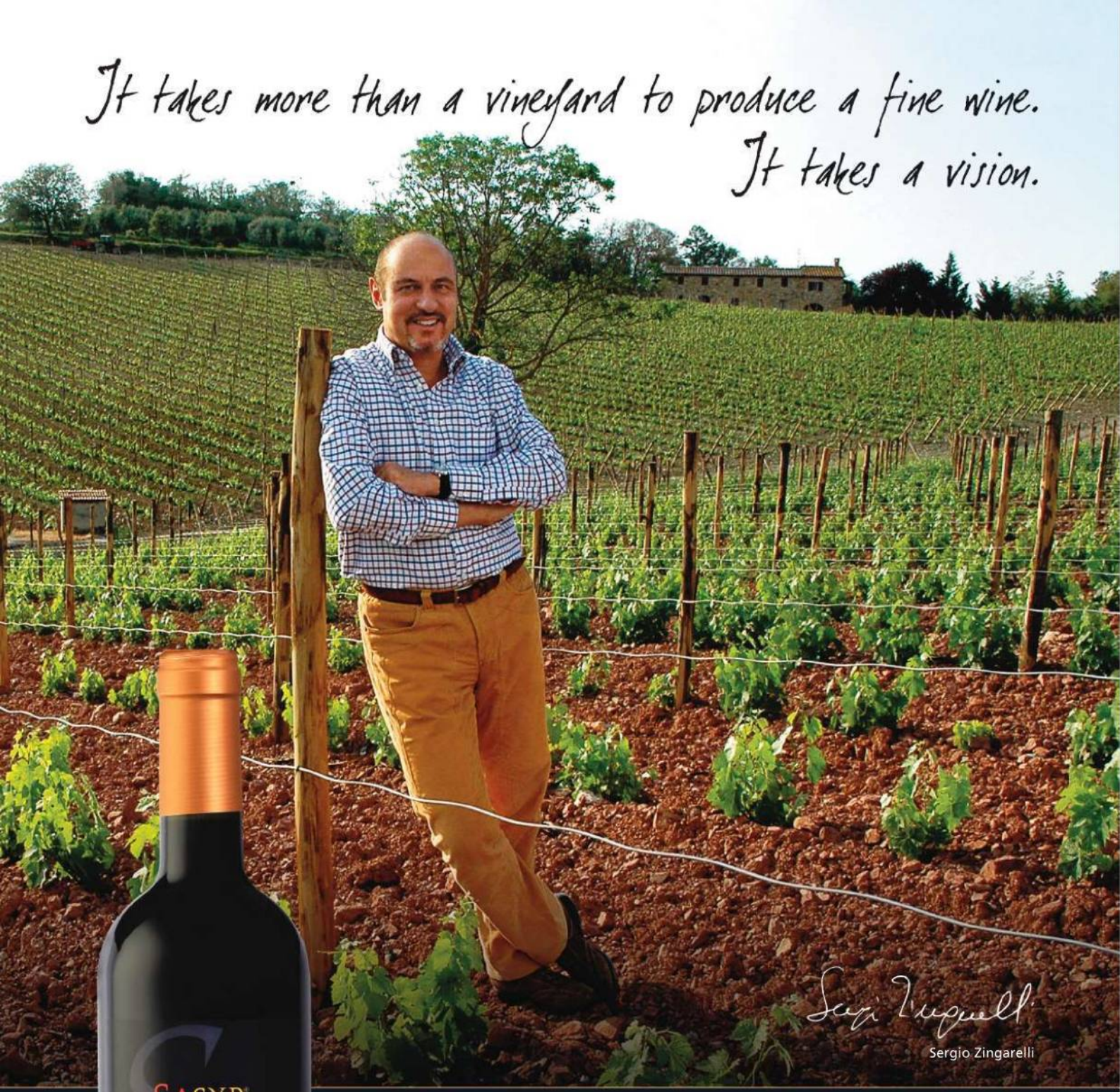
It takes a vision.



Cultivating fine wine takes far more than quality grapes and an optimal climate in which to grow them. At Rocca delle Macìe, owner Sergio Zingarelli's vision, passion and commitment are essential elements in the creation of fine wine. Here tradition meets the innovative with Sasyr®; a singular and sublime blend of sangiovese and syrah grapes from the Tuscan vineyards of Rocca delle Macìe. Sergio has steadily pursued his family's ambition to make the finest Tuscan wines in the world. Could there be a better vision than that?

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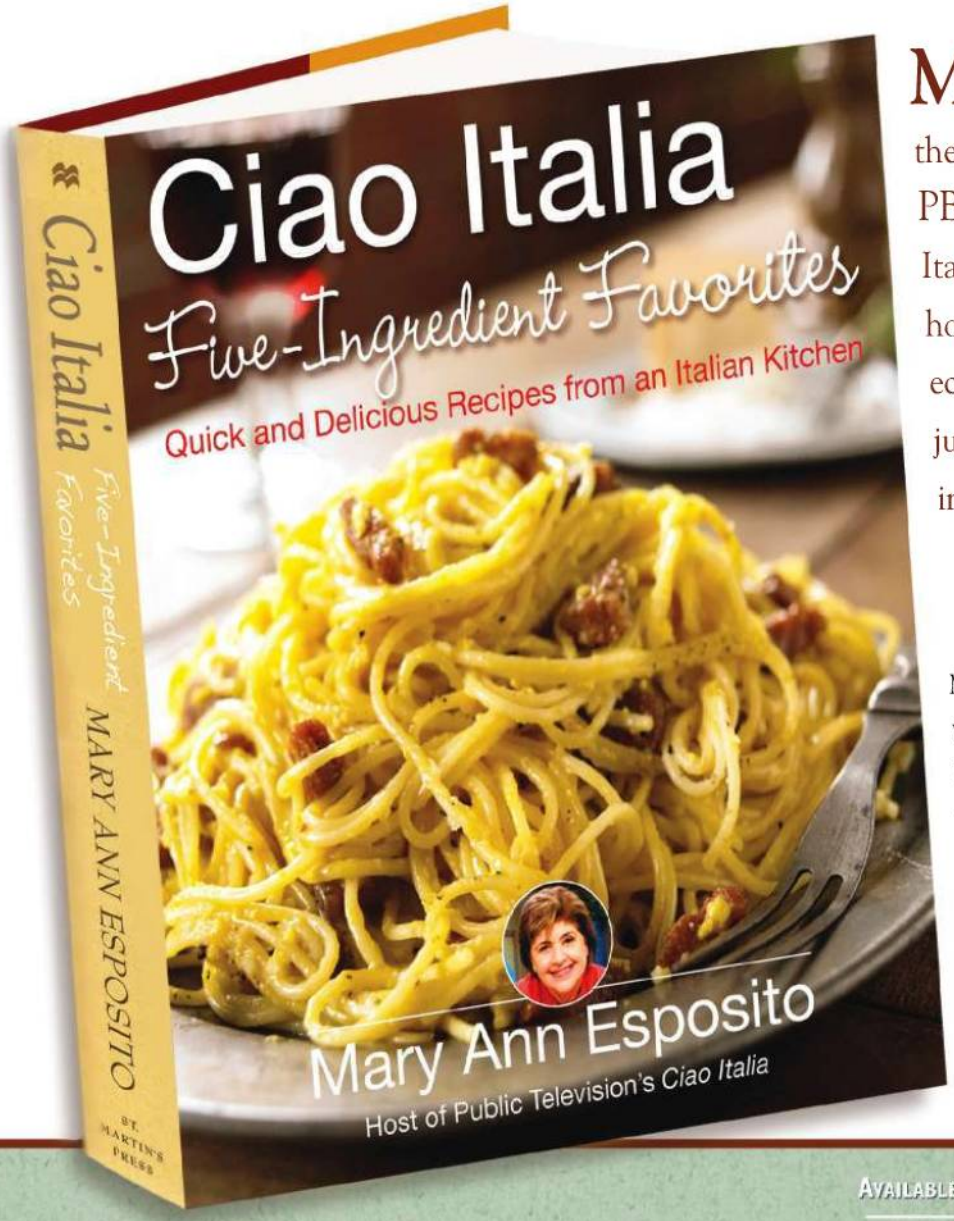

Mary Ann Esposito, the host of the popular PBS cooking show 'Ciao Italia,' shows home cooks how to make simple, economical meals using just a few quality ingredients.

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TASTES

NEW TASTES AND TREATS FROM THE ITALIAN FOOD WORLD

It's Apple Season

Bake a cake, make juicy apple drinks, or serve freshly sliced apples with cheese.

TEXT **PATRICK J. BARTLETT** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN MICHAEL LAURENCE**

One of the most compelling and exciting signs of autumn is the iconic bushel of apples. Our vernacular is full of sage apple wisdom. For instance, did you know the oft-used phrase "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" is medically correct? Eating an apple a day has proven blood-sugar leveling effects, thus warding off the urge to binge on unhealthy sweets and keep you healthier and thinner. Another piece of health information is the ongoing studies on the mighty apple's ability to fight against Alzheimer's disease and breast cancer. Medicinal value aside, apples contribute their sweet, fragrant flavors to so many things – candied apples, pies, apple turnovers, apple dumplings, apple cakes, doughnuts, cider, apple-tinis, and the British "must-have" holiday Wassail punch. Don't even think to suggest a proper Pennsylvania Dutch cook serve a warm, savory pork chop dinner without accompanying it with cooked apples.

While apples are a fall staple in the United States, they also have a hearty presence in Italy. Grown in Trentino, Emilia Romagna, the Veneto, Piemonte, and Campagna, you'll find familiar varieties like Granny Smith, Golden, Golden Delicious, Stark, Gravensteins, and Gala. Italians serve fresh apples toward the end of meals, but also use them in cakes and other dishes. According to the Italian Trade Commission, Italy is Europe's largest producer of apples and ranks as a major producer worldwide.

According to the U.S. Apple Association, the top six apple-producing states are Washington, New York, Michigan, Penn-

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It's Apple Season

sylvania, California and Virginia. With apples playing such a major role in our daily diet, you're sure to have your favorite.

The Red Delicious wins as #1 with more than 62 million bushels harvested annually in the U.S. alone. Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Pippin, Fuji, and Gala, all wonderful, are the other household apple names we commonly know. However, in recent years a new movement to preserve heirloom varieties has taken hold.

To put this in perspective, in 1892 there were around 735 apple varieties available in commercial nurseries; today there are generally fewer than 50. Some of those lost forever include the Arkansas Beauty, Chattahoochee, Red Banana, and Tuscaloosa. Examples of heirloom apples currently available in various growing regions include the Hidden Rose with its pink flesh, King David – wonderful in pies, the russet colored Ashmead's Kernel, and the late ripening, crisp and tart Sierra Beauty.

If you live near an apple-growing region, venture out this fall and sample the varieties. They're sure to turn up at local farmer's markets, too. Numerous bakeries, restaurants, fruit sheds, and parks celebrate the harvest, as well. For more on all things apples visit www.us-apple.org.

WINES: Italia's Elixir

Since the Middle Ages, Italians have sipped this tantalizing "firewater" after meals and/or added it to their morning espressos to "correct" its flavor. Grappa is distilled liquor made from pomace. Winemakers create pomace bricks of discarded grape seeds, stalks, stems, and skins left over from the winemaking process – basically wine waste. The Northern Italians, being practical people, decided to use this wine waste to make a distilled drink; Grappa was born. It was originally used as a sure way to warm up the Northern Italian farmers on cold winter mornings. Grappa gets its name from the town of Bassano del Grappa in Italy's northern region of Veneto. Today, Grappa is being made around the world; from Australia to Oregon distilleries are making Grappa with surprisingly good results. A popular cocktail making the rounds in today's fashionable bars is called the First Morning. This drink includes Grappa and espresso in honor of Grappa's origins. Mixologists shake it with Cointreau, Amaretto, and raisins to resemble a frothy coffee. Salut!. – *By Patrick Bartlett*

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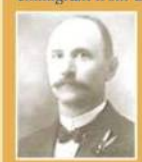

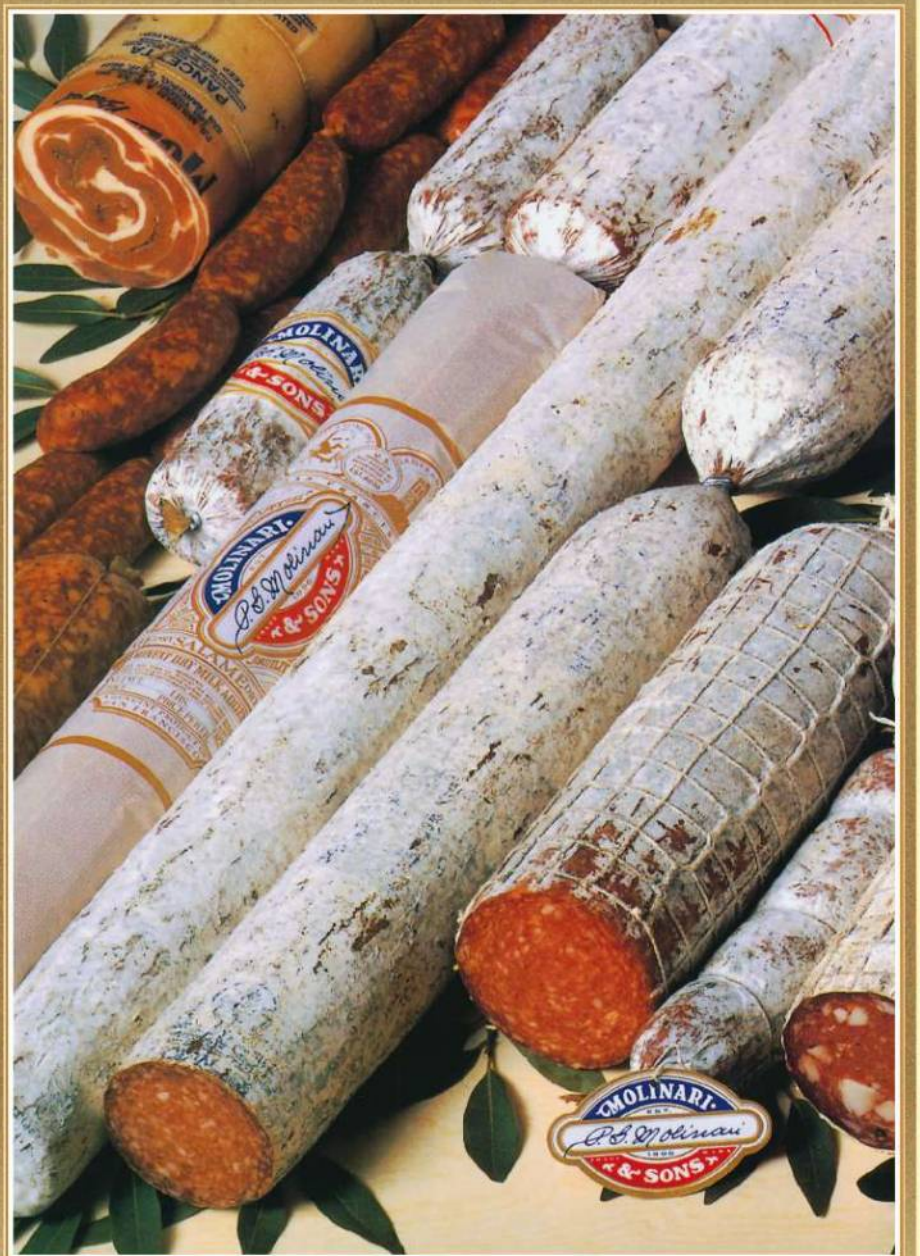

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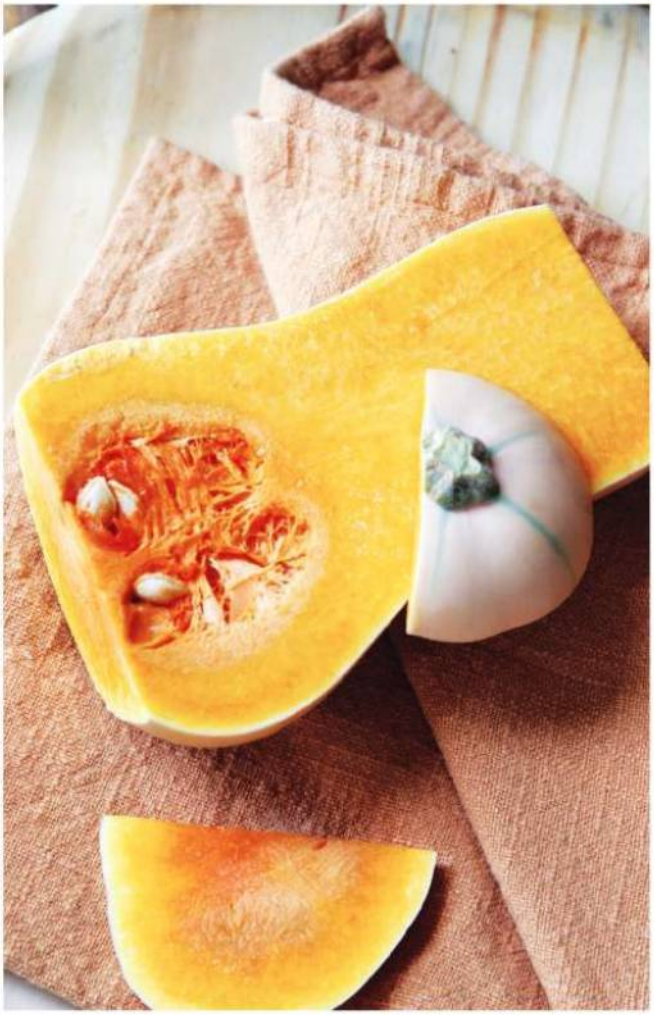
BUON APPETITO

TASTE OF THE MONTH

LEEKS

Add a leek or two to fall dishes, or feature these vegetables in a creamy soup or savory tart.

FALL HAS ARRIVED, the weather is crisp, the days short; autumn flavors abound. With all these rich flavors, it's good to know the humble leek is readily available as a simple contrast. Leeks, often referred to as "poor man's asparagus," are members of the onion family (and a distant relative of asparagus). Because they are mild, subtle, and sweet, leeks are wonderful in the oft served Leek Soup, but are also a treat roasted, thinly sliced in salads, sautéed with mixed fall vegetables, tossed in pasta, or added to just about any culinary option that calls for onions, scallions, or chives. Northern Italians know how to use leeks in their cuisine – you're sure to find a Leek Tart on many Italian menus this time of year. If the humble leek isn't a part of your fall vegetable list, it's time to get acquainted. Your local farmer's market growers will be happy to introduce you.



Squash Time

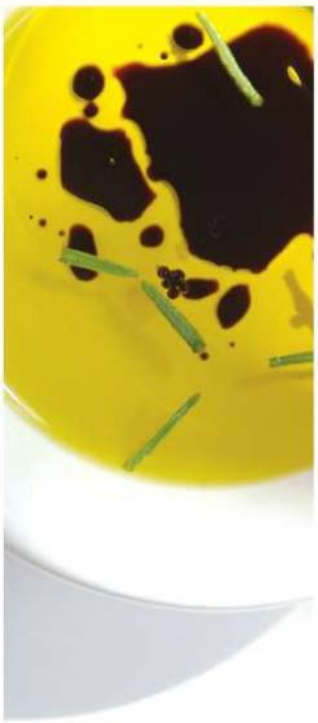
Who doesn't have memories of baked squash served in the chill months of fall and winter? The smell of squash, fresh from oven roasting is truly an autumn delicacy. While Americans are familiar with the role that squash played in early American history, it is also enjoyed in other parts of the world, including Italy. There, zucchini is a well-known variety that is used in numerous ways, from stuffing for ravioli to bread. Prolific in many Italian climates, the flesh, flowers, and seeds are all enjoyed as edible parts, making it a very versatile vegetable.

Cucuzza is actually a gourd, but it's treated as a squash. Pale green and elongated, it looks like an oversized zucchini. It can grow from fifteen inches to three feet in length and be three inches or more in diameter. Its flesh is white and must be peeled before eating. In this era of local and sustainable farming, farmer's markets are brimming with different varieties, colors, and sizes of squash. Squash varieties are so beautiful, they are often used as table decorations, or accents in flower arrangements. But at the end of the day, if you're tired, hungry, and need some comfort, squash, in numerous varieties, will fit the bill.

WHAT TO TRY

Aceto Tradizionale

For most of us, balsamic vinegar is the rich, slightly sweet vinegar artfully poured in the middle of a pool of olive oil for bread dipping. The truly adventurous drizzle it on fresh strawberries, often with cracked black pepper for added kick. However, balsamic is much more than this, and very different from the standard grocery store options. Traditional balsamic is historically aged for years in barrels made from oak, chestnut, juniper, and redwood, offering complex aromatics. Modena Italy is the birthplace of balsamic. For hundreds of years it has been used for medicinal, digestive, and culinary purposes. Aged balsamic is thick, rich, dark, syrupy, and intense in flavor, a little goes a long way. More and more specialty stores are offering traditional options; add it to your shopping list as a wonderful accompaniment for the rich, robust, and warm flavors of fall.



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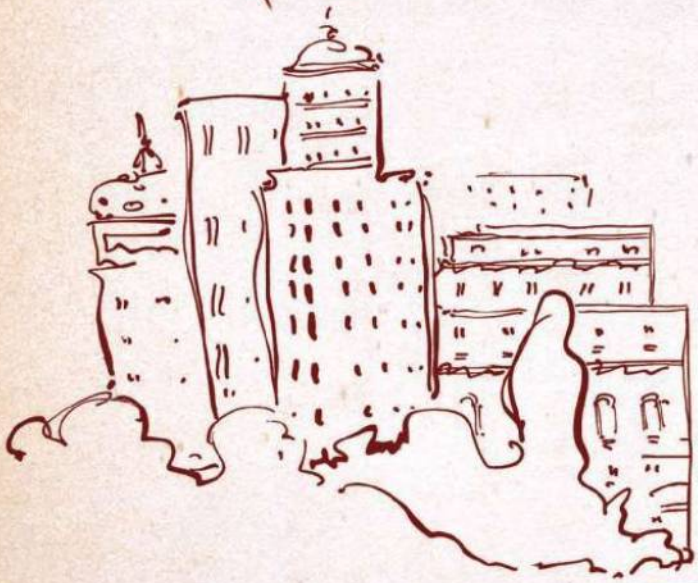

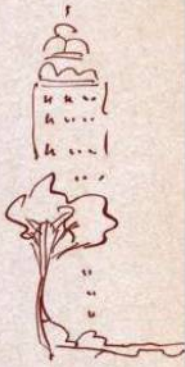

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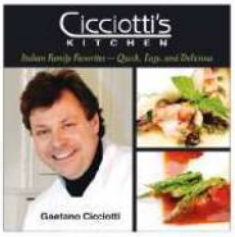

A native of Naples, Gaetano Cicciotti grew up in the kitchen, absorbing the techniques and ingredients of Old World, homestyle cooking. Now a professional chef and restaurant owner, Cicciotti shares more than 40 quick and easy Italian recipes in the cookbook *Cicciotti's Kitchen* (Chefs Press, 2010). With photos by Michael Pawleny, the book includes more than 40 easy-to-make Italian recipes like Rolled Pasta with Beef & Spinach, Penne alla Vodka, and Salmon with Greek Olives. Cicciotti owns Cicciotti's Trattoria Italiana & Seafood in Cardiff, Calif. and prides himself on satisfying customers with "the simple, fresh staples that I grew up with." Home cooks can enjoy the same with recipes from *Cicciotti's Kitchen*.

COOK ITALY
by Katie Caldesi

Katie Caldesi has spent years traveling across Italy, soaking up its culinary details. She shares her discoveries in *Cook Italy* (Kyle Books, 2010), an entertaining and comprehensive book that includes more than 400 authentic recipes and techniques from every region of Italy. Caldesi, who, along with her husband Giancarlo, owns London's Caffe Caldesi and Caldesi in Campagna in Bray, also owns La Cucina Caldesi, the only Italian cooking school in central London. She and Giancarlo have co-authored *Italian Mama's Kitchen* and *Return to Tuscany*, the cookbook that accompanies their BBC2 TV series. With a clear understanding of Italian food and culture, Caldesi breaks down the book into chapters like Antipasti, Soup, Pasta, Fish, Meat, Cheese, and Dolci. She features "classes" on technique so you'll learn step-by-step how to make ravioli, how to cook and prepare octopus, and how to roll a boned chicken, for example. With *Cook Italy*, you get authentic recipes, inspiring photos by Lisa Linder, and a slice of history.

THE ITALIAN FARMER'S TABLE
by Matthew Scialabba and Melissa Pellegrino

Many years ago while living in Rome, Matthew Scialabba and Melissa Pellegrino ran across an Italian proverb that had a poetic ring to it: "Between saying and doing lies half the ocean." That expression "has been the foundation for our perseverance" in creating *The Italian Farmer's Table: Authentic Recipes and Local Lore from Northern Italy*, a 300-plus page cookbook that explores the agriturismo life in that part of the country. For four months, professional chefs, Scialabba and Pellegrino explored small family farms in northern Italy, working the grape harvest, visiting cantinas, making goat cheese, making jam, and hunting deer. "But, best of all, we were encouraged to come into the kitchen and roll up our sleeves, to work, and learn, and become intertwined with the pulse of agriturismo life," the authors write. The book includes inspiring photography by the authors, along with 150 authentic recipes they transcribed. Among them are Fried Butternut Squash Ravioli, Carpaccio with Gorgonzola Sauce, Pears and Walnuts, and Frozen Chocolate Ricotta Cream Cake. With scenic photos by the authors and stories to go with each chapter, *The Italian Farmer's Table* (Globe Pequot Press, 2010) might entice you to give it a try – at least in your own kitchen.

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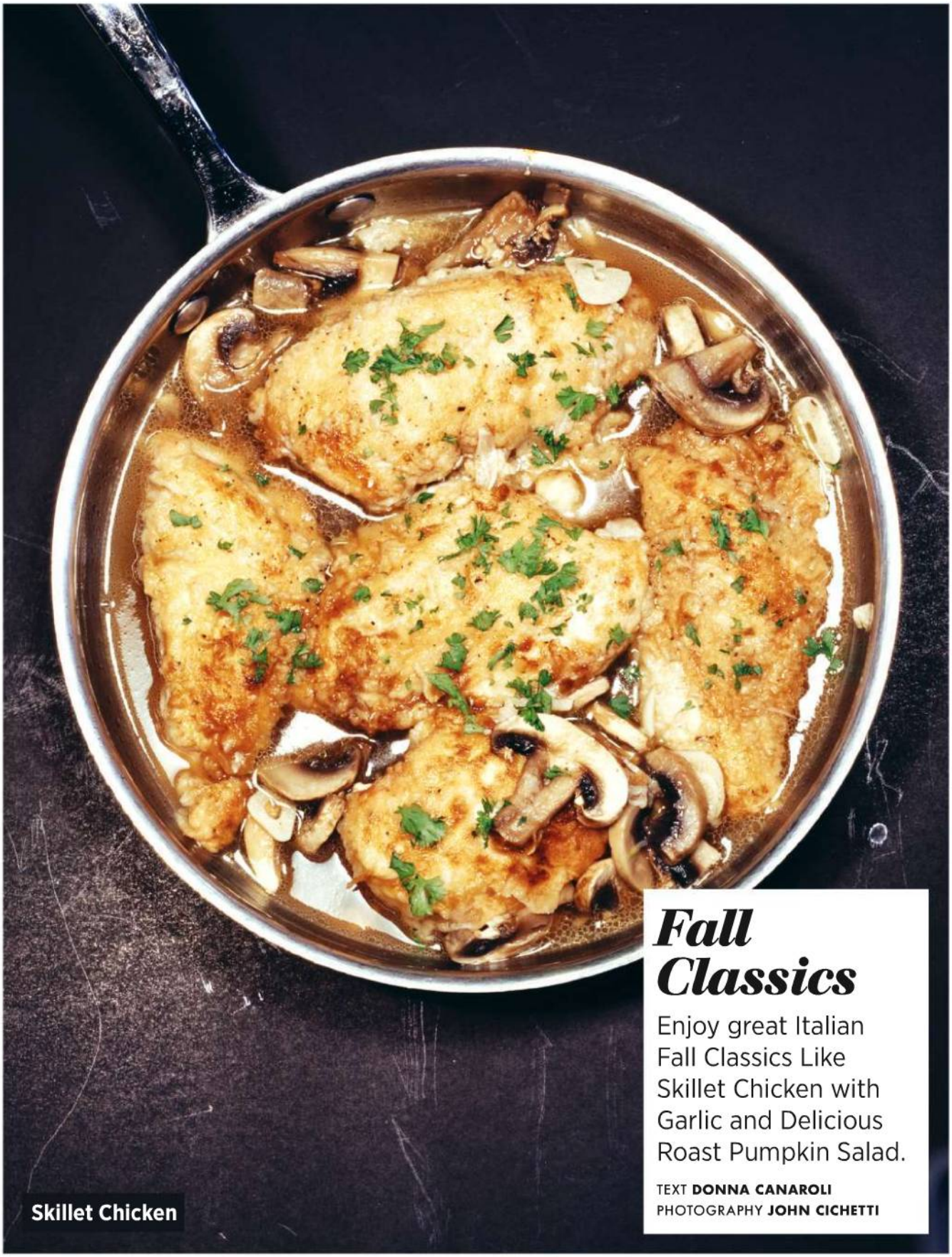

Skillet Chicken

Fall Classics

Enjoy great Italian Fall Classics Like Skillet Chicken with Garlic and Delicious Roast Pumpkin Salad.

TEXT **DONNA CANAROLI**
PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN CICHETTI**

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Fall Classics

Creamy Zucchini Soup with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 8 cloves garlic, diced
- ½ cup diced onion
- 4 cups white beans (precooked or canned, drained and rinsed)
- 1 cup diced potato
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 3 cups diced zucchini
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 dash of pepper
- 4 to 6 teaspoons sun-dried tomato pesto

In a large pot, combine olive oil and garlic and cook over medium-low heat for 6 minutes. Add the onion and cook on medium heat for 5 minutes. Add the white beans, potatoes and chicken broth, bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove soup from pot, let cool slightly, then puree in a blender, one-third at a time. Return to pot, add zucchini, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil and cook for 15 to 20 minutes or until zucchini is tender. (If soup becomes too thick, add extra water.) Remove soup from pot, let sit for 10 minutes, then divide into soup bowls, topping each with a teaspoon of sun-dried tomato pesto, which can be found at most specialty food stores and some supermarkets. If you have leftover diced chicken, toss in a cupful with the zucchini. It adds an extra layer of texture and flavor.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Skillet Chicken with Garlic and Mushrooms

- ½ cup flour
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- Black pepper to taste
- 6 skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 8 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
- ¼ teaspoon dried red chile flakes
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 to 2 tablespoons bread crumbs
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 3 to 4 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped

Combine flour, salt and pepper in a plastic bag. Add the moistened chicken breasts one at a time and shake to coat well. Set aside. In a large skillet add the olive oil and butter and cook on high for 3-4 minutes. Place the breasts in the skillet and cook on high until they sizzle. Continue for 2-3 minutes or until chicken is golden brown. Turn chicken and add garlic, mushrooms, chile flakes and chicken broth. Cook for 8-10 minutes or until chicken is cooked through. Add bread crumbs and lemon juice and remove from pan. Serve with juices and parsley.

Makes 6 servings.

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Roast Pumpkin Salad

- 2 cups fresh pumpkin, peeled and cut into bite-size pieces
- ½ cup thinly sliced red onion
- 1 teaspoon dried chile flakes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 4 handfuls mixed greens
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place pumpkin, onion, chile flakes and 2 tablespoons olive oil in a baking dish; toss well to combine. Bake for 35 to 45 minutes, or until pumpkin is tender. Remove and let cool.

In a large bowl toss greens with 1 tablespoon olive oil, salt, pepper and the pumpkin-onion mixture. Arrange salad on plates and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

Slow-Roasted Cherry Tomatoes

- 1 dozen cherry tomatoes
- 6 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- Kosher salt
- 5 or 6 fresh basil leaves, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 200°F. Add two tablespoons of olive oil to roasting pan. Add tomatoes, tossing to coat well. Sprinkle with salt. Roast for 5 hours. When done, remove from oven and set aside.

In a small bowl, combine remaining olive oil and basil, stirring well. Pour over tomatoes and let sit for 30 minutes before serving. When ready to serve, spoon some of the basil oil over the tomatoes and serve warm with a little buffalo mozzarella cheese, if desired.

Makes 3 to 4 servings.

Penne with Jalapeño Pesto

- ½ pound penne
- 2 medium jalapeno peppers, stems removed
- 2 garlic cloves
- ½ cup chopped toasted walnuts
- ½ cup green olives, pitted and cut in half
- ½ cup olive oil
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt to taste
- 4 Roma tomatoes, diced

Cook penne according to package directions.

Meanwhile, in a food processor, combine peppers and garlic and process until finely chopped. Add walnuts, olives, olive oil and cheese, stirring well to combine. Taste for salt. Toss pesto with pasta and fresh tomatoes.

Makes 4 servings.

Slow roasting adds depth and greater concentration of flavors

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Fall Classics

Frangipane Tart with Fresh Apples

- 1 prepared pie crust for 9-inch tart pan
- 2 cups toasted almonds
- ⅔ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon almond extract (or vanilla)
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 or 4 golden apples, peeled and sliced
- 2 teaspoons brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 pinch ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons honey

Preheat oven to 375°F. Press the prepared crust into the 9-inch tart pan with removable bottom. Prick the shell with a fork. Lay a sheet of foil over surface and fill with dried beans (to hold down crust for baking). Bake for 10 minutes. Remove foil and beans and set aside crust to cool slightly.

In a food processor, combine almonds, sugar, eggs, extract and butter; puree mixture and set aside. Toss the apple slices with the sugars, cinnamon and lemon juice until well coated; set aside.

Spread the almond mixture on the slightly cooled crust. Arrange the apple slices on top. Place the tart on a baking sheet and bake 40 to 45 minutes, until tart is golden. Brush with honey and serve warm.

Makes 8 servings.

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At Home In Anacapri

To Anacapri's verdant plain, we upward climb with willing feet, without whose grand and lovely sights a visit here is incomplete.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY **LAUREN BIRMINGHAM PISCITELLI**

The island of Capri stretches four square miles and lies on the cusp of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Bay of Naples. Moorish white houses set on rocky limestone cliffs wrapped in endemic flora have made the blue *isola* a dreamy destination for travelers throughout time. Lying 1,932 feet above Capri is Anacapri, from the Greek for *Capri of above.*

Capri was not always an island. As legend says, it was once part of the Sorrentine Peninsula and was disconnected during the Phlegrean volcanic eruption. Say the word *Capri*—Italians say it with an accent on the first syllable—and immediately one conjures up images of the Blue Grotto, the buzzing *Piazzetta*, the Roman Emperor Tiberius—known to throw his concubines off its cliffs—Capri pants, and a guest list of jet-setting VIPs. It is no wonder that in 29AD Emperor Augustus traded Ischia, the neighboring volcanic island, for it. Augustus named it *Apragòpoli*, a place of *"dolce far niente,"* meaning *sweet do nothing*, and built several villas and temples dedicated to the Nymphs. His successor, Roman Emperor Tiberius, also lived and reigned on the island for 10 years, building another 12 elaborate villas.

However Capri is not only a land of kings, queens, castles and villas, there is also a simple folk residing in Anacapri and they are called *Ciammura. Ciammura*, pronounced 'cha-moore-ra,' are the *contadini*, the farmers who have been growing fruits and vegetables and making wine for centuries.

In local dialect, *Ciammura* translates to the mountain people or the natives of Anacapri. Swedish royal physician Axel Munthe resided in Anacapri from 1901 to 1943, and wrote, '*on the top of the stairs is Anacapri, but only gente di montanga, (mountain people) live there.*' Years later, a distinct line stills exists between *Capri* and *Anacapri,* and the *Caprese* and *Anacaprese.*

Until 1874 the only thing connecting Capri to Anacapri was the Phoenician stairway or *La Scala Fenicia.* Chiseled in stone and climbing one thousand seventeen stairs up from the port *Marina Grande* to the *Villa San Michele*, the stairs were built by the Greeks and named after the Phoenicians. Upon reaching the top, you see grapevines, olive trees, vegetable gardens and orchards running wild. Tending these lush gardens are the *contadini* or

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pastene. Even Tiberius kept a skilled gardener on hand named Serpullo. The vegetarian Emperor Tiberius grew an elaborate vegetable garden at his Villa Jovis from which he would make *Cianfotta*: a vegetable medley of delicately chopped onions, browned with olive oil in a casserole, and then slow cooked with artichokes, potatoes, zucchinis, asparagus, shelled peas, peppers, onion, tomatoes, broad beans, olive oil, parsley and basil and served with toasted garlic bread. This ancient specialty is still served today and is usually paired with the local white wine, Falanghina.

Recipes over time have not changed, and you will still find this local dish served from Monte Solaro to the gardens behind le Boffe, a *paese* of white casbah villas off the Piazza Vittoria. An almost hidden turn off the Piazza Vittoria leads you to a winding footpath lined with flora, farms and to Maria's garden.

Open the wrought iron gate that frames a welcoming ceramic tile bearing the name *Maruzzella*, (a nickname meaning little Maria or tiny sea snails) and step inside to the garden and cantina kitchen of Maria Acampora. A long country wooden table topped with fire engine red bell peppers, sweet cherry tomatoes, garlic and eggplant greet you, and there in her apron is Maria.

"I don't measure, I use my eyes," she tells us in Neapolitan dialect. Her burning black eyes are the color of the olives that she serves spiked with fennel.

She opens the door of the 100-year-old wood-burning oven and the sweet smell of *salsiccia paesana*—handmade sausage wrapped in wild laurel leaves—hits your nose.

"From spring peas to poppies, summer roses, celery, potatoes, spinach, zucchini, eggplant, black cherries, oranges, lemons and autumn squash are just a few of the things growing in our organic garden.

"What's in our garden is on our table," Maria explains. Her garden stretches from the foot of her kitchen and down toward the sea.

The table spread includes what Maria calls 'food for the farmers,' *zucchini alla scapece*—flash-fried squash cut on a mandolino to paper thin coins, dressed with mint, olive oil and sea salt; *Caprese*—a handmade braid of mozzarella dressed with cherry tomatoes and basil; *involtini di melanzane*—thinly sliced grilled eggplant that have been rolled and stuffed with smoked mozzarella and topped with diced cherry tomatoes; *fagiolata*—fresh brown beans slow cooked with onion and pancetta in the brick oven, and *fritturine di*

MARIA'S GARDEN:
Bounty for her table

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basilico & frittureine fiore di zucchini-small flash fried puffs or *boffe* as they are called, consisting of fresh basil and squash flowers flash fried in sunflower oil and sprinkled with sea salt. *Zeppole Anacaprese*-sweet golden puffs twisted in a knot, lightly flash fried, dredged in sugar, filled with a *crema pasticciera* and topped with a black cherry are for dessert. This *antica dolce* dessert recipe, as Maria calls it, is made with flour, potatoes, sugar, butter and a little lemon.

Maria is just one of the Anacaprese women who keep the harvest traditions alive. Anna Pane, her neighbor, tells us about the *Ciammura*.

"The Capri people call us the *Ciammura*, farmers and peasants," she explains in her soft dialect. Anna, is an award-winning chef and owner of La Rondinella, her family restaurant. She tells more about the people and the town.

"Anacapri was always the poor part of town, and some 60 years ago our family restaurant was the only place with a television; everyone came to watch it," she says.

Ciammura is a pasta dish that has been handed down in her family and includes local ingredients that were always on hand, *alici e olive verde*, fresh sardines and fresh cracked green olives. This dazzling combination of fresh garden flavors with the ever so small delicate sardines tossed with linguine is a winner.

"Our food style is traditional, we use lots of vegetables that grow year round along with fresh local fish," Anna explains. "What we make at home is what we serve in the restaurant."

She shares her recipes for a traditional *contadini* lunch including, *Polpettine Con Peperoncini Verdi*—mini meatballs with sweet green peppers—hearty pan roasted sweet green long peppers with cherry tomatoes and garlic topped with small sized meatballs; *Pezzogna all' Aqua Pazza*—Fish in Crazy Water—fresh fish from the dentex family slow cooked with garlic, cherry tomatoes; and, a *Torta Caprese Bianca*—white Caprese cake—a flourless cake made with almonds.

"We are simple people, and that's what counts," says Maria. The traditions of Anacapri and its harvest take place each September with an autumn festival called *Settembrata* which celebrates the Autumn Harvest. Anacapri, a verdant plain, so close and yet so far from Capri.

Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli is founder and owner of Cooking Vacations Italy which specializes in culinary tours, hands-on cooking classes and cultural adventures in Italy. Cook with Maria at Cooking Vacations Italy. See www.cooking-vacations.com or phone (617) 247-4112 for more information.

White Caprese Cake

- ¾ cup butter, softened
- ¾ cup + 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 6 eggs
- 10 ounces white chocolate
- 10 ounces almonds, peeled
- Zest of 3 lemons
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 tablespoon Limoncello
- Powdered sugar, for dusting
- Lemon zest curls for garnish, if desired

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, cream butter with an electric mixer for about 10 minutes until foamy. Add the sugar and continue to beat for an additional 10 minutes. Add the eggs one at a time while still mixing.

Meanwhile, chop white chocolate with almonds in food processor until finely ground. Add to the butter mixture and mix well. Add the lemon zest and lemon juice. Lastly, add the baking powder and Limoncello and mix until well combined. Prepare 12-inch round baking pan with butter and parchment paper (or butter and flour).

Pour batter into the prepared pan and bake for 40 to 50 minutes until golden. Remove and allow to cool completely. Once cooled, flip it out of the pan and serve dusted with powdered sugar and garnish with lemon zest curls, if desired.

Makes 12 servings.
Courtesy of Anna Pane,
La Rondinella, Anacapri

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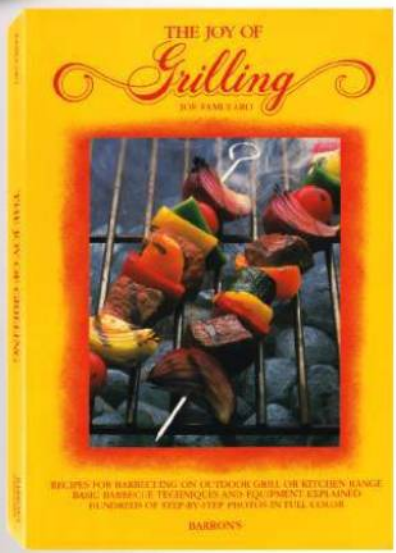
The Italian Soup Cookbook

(Workman, NYC - 1998)

"One of the best kept secrets of Italy is soup and Joe Famularo knows it. Joe gives us straightforward, easy-to-follow, mouthwatering recipes that capture the hearth and soul of Italy. I truly enjoyed it." Biba Caggiano, TV host and author



The Joy of Grilling

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A Cook's Tour Of Italy

by Joe Famularo (HP Books - Penguin Group USA 2003)

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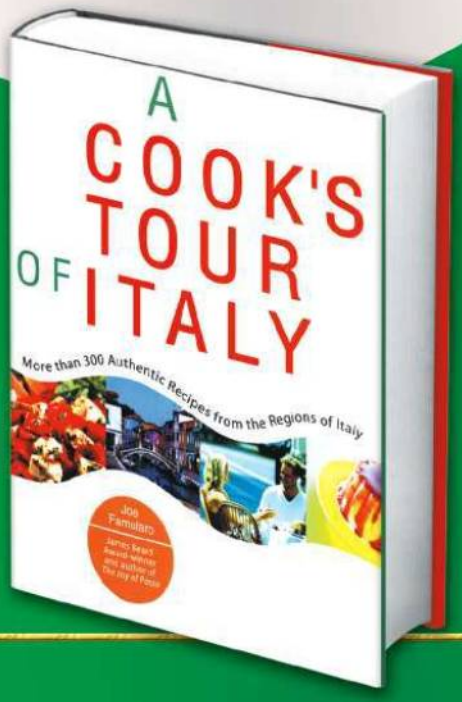

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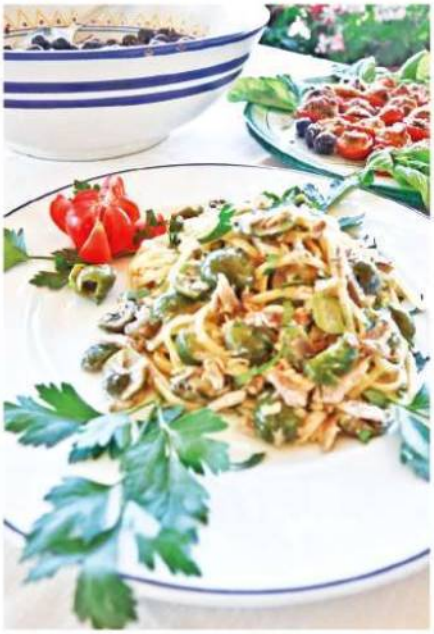

Ciammurra - Anacaprese Pasta

- 12 ounces linguine
- 4 to 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 whole cloves garlic
- 20 fresh anchovies, large pieces
- 1 tablespoon dry white wine
- 3½ ounces pitted green olives, chopped
- Fresh parsley for garnish, if desired
- Salt to taste

Prepare the linguine according to package directions. While the linguine is cooking, prepare the sauce. In a large pan, heat olive oil then add the garlic and sauté. Add the anchovies and sauté until they are golden. Add the white wine and allow to evaporate a moment, then add the chopped olives.

Meanwhile, cook the linguine in boiling salted water and drain when just before al dente. Add the linguine to the pan with the sauce and sauté together another 2 to 3 minutes to finish cooking. Add chopped fresh parsley and salt to taste and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

-Courtesy of Anna Pane, La Rondinella, Anacapri

Fish in Crazy Water

- 1 pound sea bass or sea bream
- Sea salt to taste
- 8 cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 1 or 2 teaspoons virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons or more fresh chopped parsley
- Crostini

Clean the fish well and descale it if necessary; place it in a large shallow pan on the stove. Cover it half way with water. Add sea salt to taste. Add the tomatoes and olive oil. Cook over a low heat for 15 to 20 minutes.

When the fish is cooked, serve it warm in its juice with crostini on the side. Garnish with chopped parsley.

Makes 4 servings.

-Courtesy Anna Pane, La Rondinella, Anacapri

Basil Puffs

- 1 1/4-oz. package dry yeast
- 1½ cups water
- Pinch of salt
- 3⅓ cups flour
- Pepper, if desired
- Basil, handful, ripped
- Sunflower oil, for frying

Mix all ingredients except oil together and allow to rest 10 to 30 minutes depending on how warm it is outside. The batter should be elastic and pull back when you put in the spoon. Spoon the batter into hot sunflower oil and fry puffs for 2 to 3 minutes, turning so they turn golden on both sides. Drain on paper towel and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

Variations: Instead of basil, try making them with rosemary, arugula, sage, zucchini flowers or local herbs.

Mini Meatballs with Green Chile Peppers

For the meatballs:

- 5 ounces ground beef
- 2 pieces stale bread (without crusts) dipped in milk
- Handful Parmigiano, grated
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- Salt, to taste
- Pinch of parsley
- 1 egg

For the Green Chile Peppers:

- 7 ounces long, mild green chile peppers
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 whole garlic clove
- 5 ounces cherry tomatoes, about 10 to 15
- Pinch of oregano
- Handful of fresh basil
- Salt to taste

For the meatballs, mix together the ground beef, moistened stale bread, Parmigiano, garlic, salt, parsley and 1 egg. Form into small balls about the size of marbles (about ½ tablespoon each). Fry or bake meatballs until browned.

Remove the tops of the green chile peppers (seeds will come out with the stem). In a large pan, heat olive oil and add the whole garlic clove. Add the cherry tomatoes and sauté about 5 minutes until cherry tomatoes are soft.

Add the green chile peppers and cook about 10 minutes, covered. Add the cooked meatballs and toss together for an additional 10 minutes so the meatballs take on the flavor of the green chile peppers. Add oregano, fresh basil and salt to taste. Serve immediately as an appetizer or second course.

Makes 4 servings.

- Adapted from a recipe by Anna Pane, La Rondinella, Anacapri

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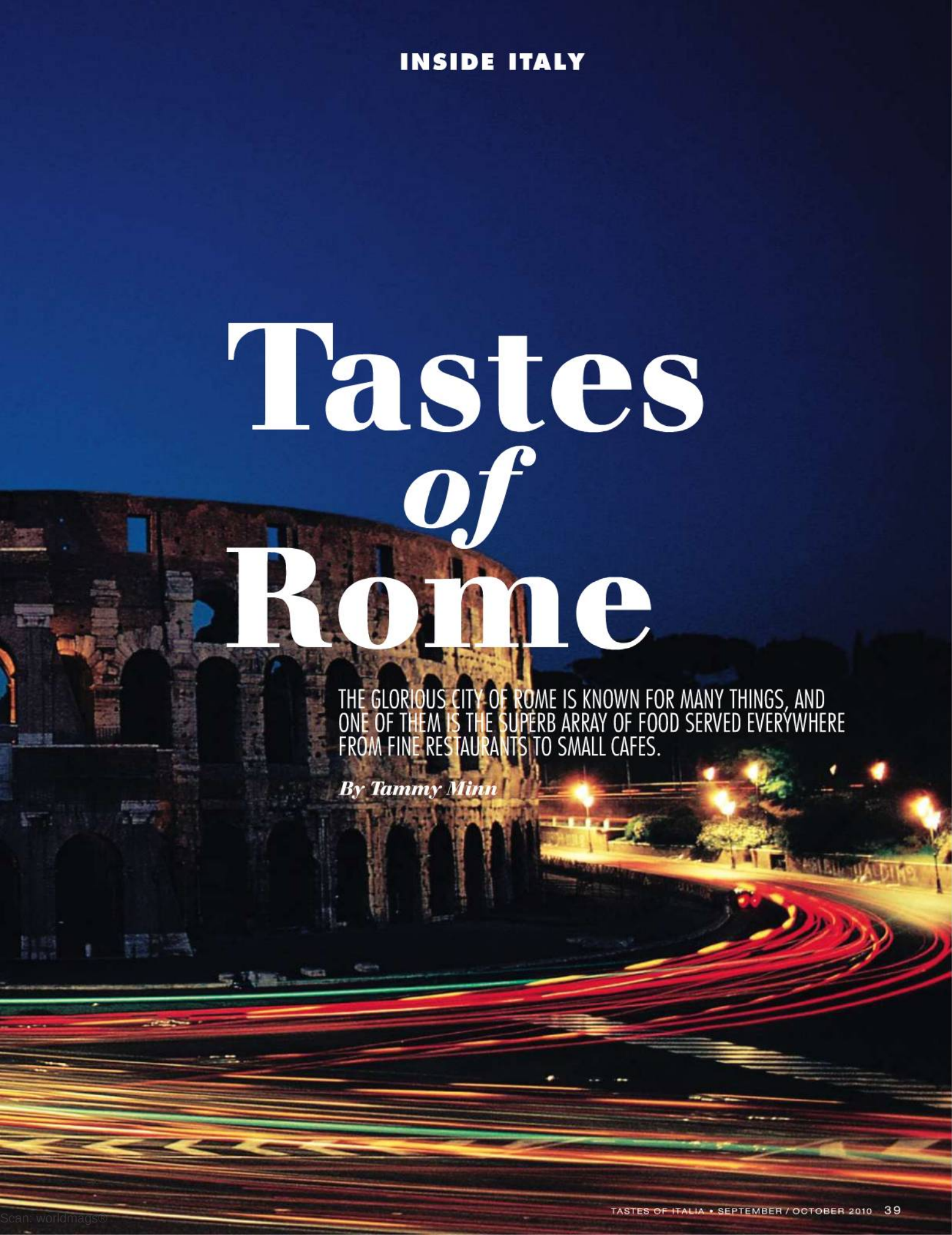
Tastes *of* Rome

THE GLORIOUS CITY OF ROME IS KNOWN FOR MANY THINGS, AND ONE OF THEM IS THE SUPERB ARRAY OF FOOD SERVED EVERYWHERE FROM FINE RESTAURANTS TO SMALL CAFES.

By Tammy Minn



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TASTES OF ROME

Rich and savory, simple and pleasing. These are the foods of Rome, a city known for its refined cuisine, but also for its authentic treatment of seasonal foods. Rome's culinary reputation is rooted in its past. The seat of the great Roman Empire brought together a variety of people from different cultures and classes, resulting in diverse palates. In addition, some of the best chefs in the world were brought to Rome to cook for the popes and the city became known for its high cuisine. Chef Bartolomeo Scappi, who cooked for Pius IV in the Vatican kitchen, experimented freely with recipes. Scappi became well known in 1570 when his cookbook, *Opera dell'arte del cucinare,* was published. It included about 1,000 recipes of Renaissance cuisine and described cooking techniques and tools. It reportedly contained the first known rendering of a fork.

But while some ate complex cuisine, others, usually the less affluent, stuck to the simple flavors of the land, which offered an abundance of food choices. Located in the Lazio region, the area includes the Viterbo province, known for its olive oil, Sambuca and wine; the Sabine mountains, which yield cured pork; fertile soil ripe with olive groves, vineyards, orchards and gardens; pastures that produce meats and hams, cheese, mushrooms, and white and black truffles; and the Tiber River, which in ancient times was a great source of fish. And of course, as in other parts of Italy, pasta is a staple. On mornings except Sunday, a farmers market is held where fish and fresh produce are sold. Artichokes, fava beans, peas, zucchini, mint and rosemary are popular ingredients you'll find in Rome, depending on the season.

Sheep are abundant in the Lazio region and their milk is used to produce several kinds of cheese. Pecorino Romano is perhaps the most famous. Aged eight to nine months, it is a very sharp cheese, and is often used for grating. A close substitute is Parmigiano. Besides cheeses made from sheep's milk, mozzarella di bufalo, a mozzarella made from the milk of water buffaloes, is also popular. Soft and mild, it's best eaten when it's as fresh as possible.

Roman recipes often combine the best ingredients from the region: Zucchini with Garlic and Chile, Veal Rolls with Prosciutto, and Braised Pearl Onions rely on fresh ingredients seasoned with herbs, olive oil, and wine or wine vinegar. And of course, what would a meal in Rome be like without wine?

Wines made near Rome are known as Castelli Romani and are produced in the Alban Hills, just south of Rome. With well-drained, volcanic soil, certain varietals do well and produce various wines. One is the well-known is Frascati, a dry or sweet wine that is sometimes made in the sparkling style, though the still version is the most popular. Labels include Novello, Superiore or Novello Superiore. The wines are made from at least 50 percent Malvasia *biance di Candia* grapes. The balance comes from several varietals, including Malvasia del Lazio and Trebbiano Giallo.

As for dessert, Romans go light. A simple Lemon Cream with Fresh Berries is a welcome end to a satisfying meal.

While Rome is known for its high cuisine, its roots are in the simple food of the land, making Roman recipes easy to sample at home.

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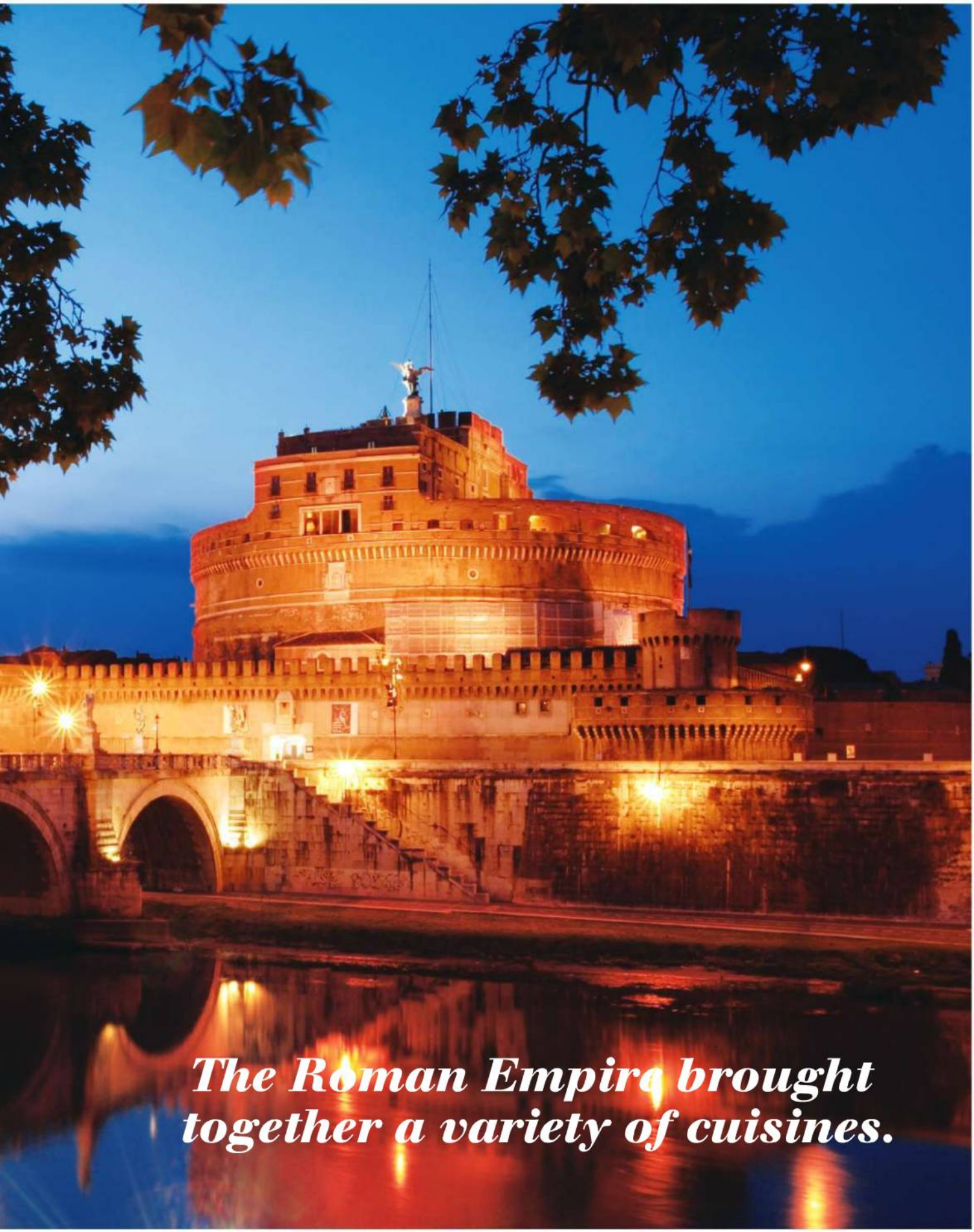

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Halibut in a Parsley Caper Sauce
(Pesce in Salsa di Caperi)

- 6 halibut (or sea bass) fillets, patted dry
- ½ cup flour
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons capers, drained
- ¼ cup white wine
- 3 tablespoons fresh minced parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 to 3 fresh lemons, cut into wedges for garnish

In a large baking dish, sift together flour, salt and pepper; set aside.

In a large skillet, combine olive oil and butter on medium heat. Working quickly, dredge the fish on both sides with flour mixture. Place fish in the skillet and cook on medium high heat until golden. The cooking time will depend on thickness of fillets, but fish should be cooked until all the flesh is opaque. Remove fish to platter.

Quickly add capers and wine to skillet, scraping the bottom. Cook about 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in parsley, salt and pepper. Top fish with caper mixture and garnish with lemon wedges.

Makes 6 servings.

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Fettuccine "Alfredo" (Fettuccine al Burro)

- 1 pound fettuccine
- 1¼ cups grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1½ sticks butter, cut into pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Cook pasta according to package directions. When pasta is cooked, remove 2 tablespoons of cooking water and place in large mixing bowl. Drain pasta and add to bowl. Add cheese, butter, salt and pepper. Serve in warmed serving bowls.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

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Artichoke Hearts in Garlic and Olive Oil
(Carciofi Alla Romana)

- 6 large artichokes, trimmed and thistles removed
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ½ cup white wine
- ½ cup olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 cup water
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 tablespoons fresh minced parsley
- 3 tablespoons shaved Parmesan cheese

Fill a large bowl half full with water. Peel and trim the artichokes and cut the hearts into quarters. Place artichokes in the bowl with lemon juice and let sit for 10 minutes. Drain and pat dry.

In a large skillet, combine artichokes, wine, olive oil, garlic and vinegar, and cook on medium for 5 minutes. Add 1 cup of water, salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until artichokes are tender. Remove with juices and place in serving dish. Top with parsley and cheese and serve. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

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Spaghetti with Cheese and Pepper (Cacio E Pepe)

- 1 pound spaghetti
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons freshly ground pepper
- 1½ cup grated Pecorino Romano cheese
- Salt to taste

Cook spaghetti according to package directions.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet, combine olive oil and pepper and heat on medium for 4 to 5 minutes. When pasta is almost done, add 3/4 cup pasta water to skillet and bring to a boil. Drain cooked pasta and add to skillet. Add cheese and salt and toss well to combine. Cook until water is almost evaporated. Serve with an extra sprinkle of cheese and pepper.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Veal Rolls with Prosciutto

- 1 pound thin veal scallops, about 12
- 12 fresh sage leaves
- 12 thin slices prosciutto
- Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ¾ cup Marsala wine

Place the veal slices between two sheets of wax paper. With a mallet or rolling pin, pound them until almost transparent. Rinse and pat dry.

To assemble, place 1 sage leaf and 1 slice of prosciutto on each piece of veal. Roll up and insert a toothpick to hold them together. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

In a large skillet, heat the butter on medium. Add the veal rolls and brown well, turning with tongs (you may need to remove the toothpick to turn). When rolls are brown, add the wine to the skillet and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 7 to 8 minutes, scraping bits off the bottom. Arrange the rolls on a serving platter. Top with pan juices and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

Note: This is an inexact process. Not all the veal slices and prosciutto will be the same size, so adjust directions as you go.

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The best chefs came to Rome to cook for the popes.

Braised Pearl Onions
(Cipolline)

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ pounds white pearl onions, peeled
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon flour
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley

In a large skillet, combine butter, oil and onions. Cook on medium for 12 to 15 minutes, until golden brown. Add vinegar, sugar, flour, salt and pepper. Cook until sauce thickens, about 4 to 5 minutes. Top with parsley and serve.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Zucchini with Garlic and Chile
(Zucchine con Pepperoncino)

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1½ pounds zucchini, washed, trimmed and cut into 1/4-inch rounds
- 1 teaspoon dried red chile flakes
- Kosher salt to taste
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons fresh minced parsley

In a large skillet, combine olive oil and garlic and cook on medium for 3 minutes. Add zucchini, chile flakes and salt, and cook on medium until golden on both sides. Stir to prevent overcooking. Add vinegar and scrape bits off bottom. Cook another 4 to 5 minutes. Stir in parsley and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

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Lemon Cream with Fresh Berries (Crema alla Limone)

- 1½ cups heavy whipping cream
- Grated zest of 2 lemons
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- Pinch of salt
- 1 pound fresh berries
- Fresh mint for garnish

In a large bowl, combine cream, zest, sugar, lemon juice and salt and beat until stiff peaks form.

To serve, divide berries among goblets. Add cream equally and top each with a sprig of mint.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Note: For an icy treat, spoon dessert as indicated, then freeze for 2 hours and serve.

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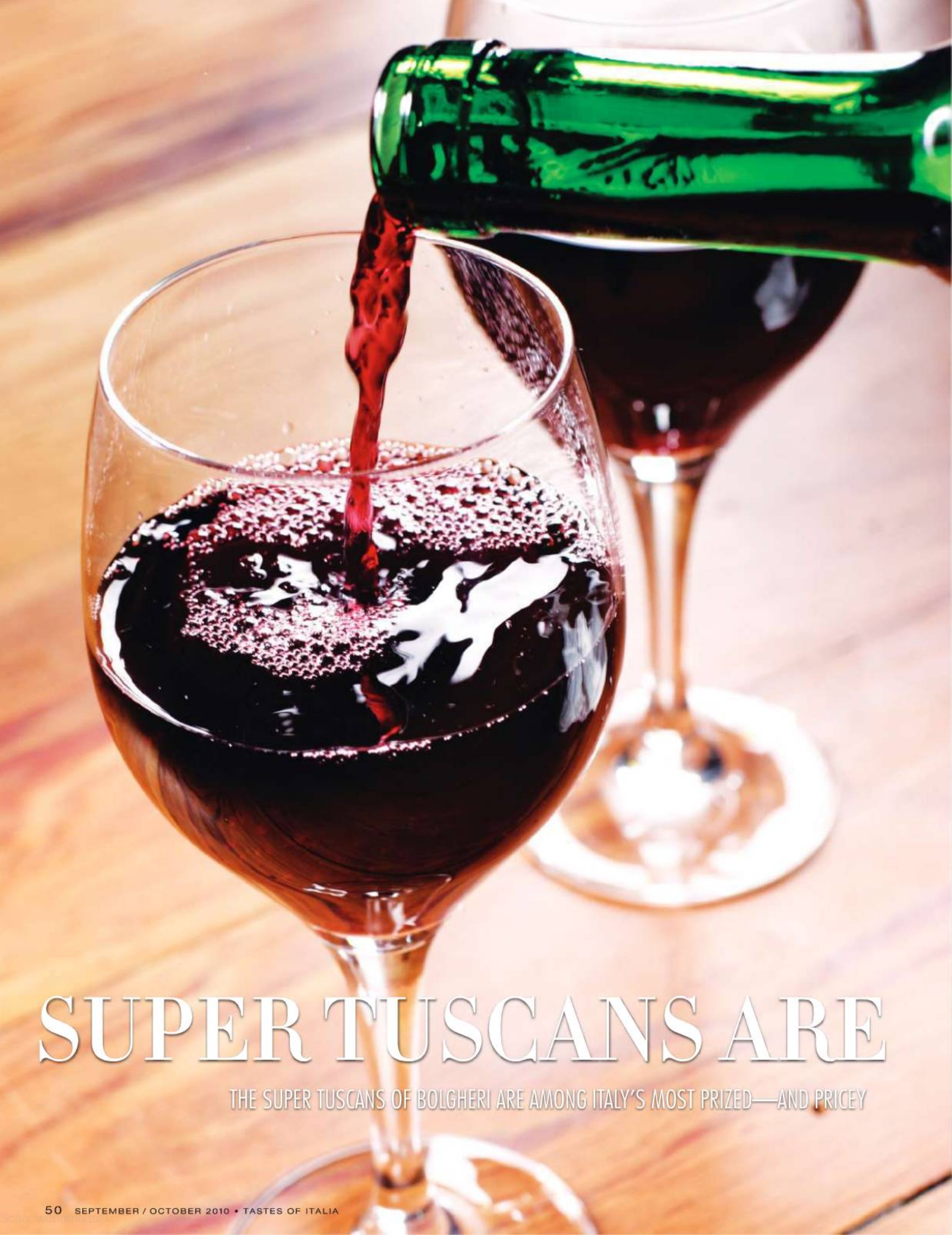
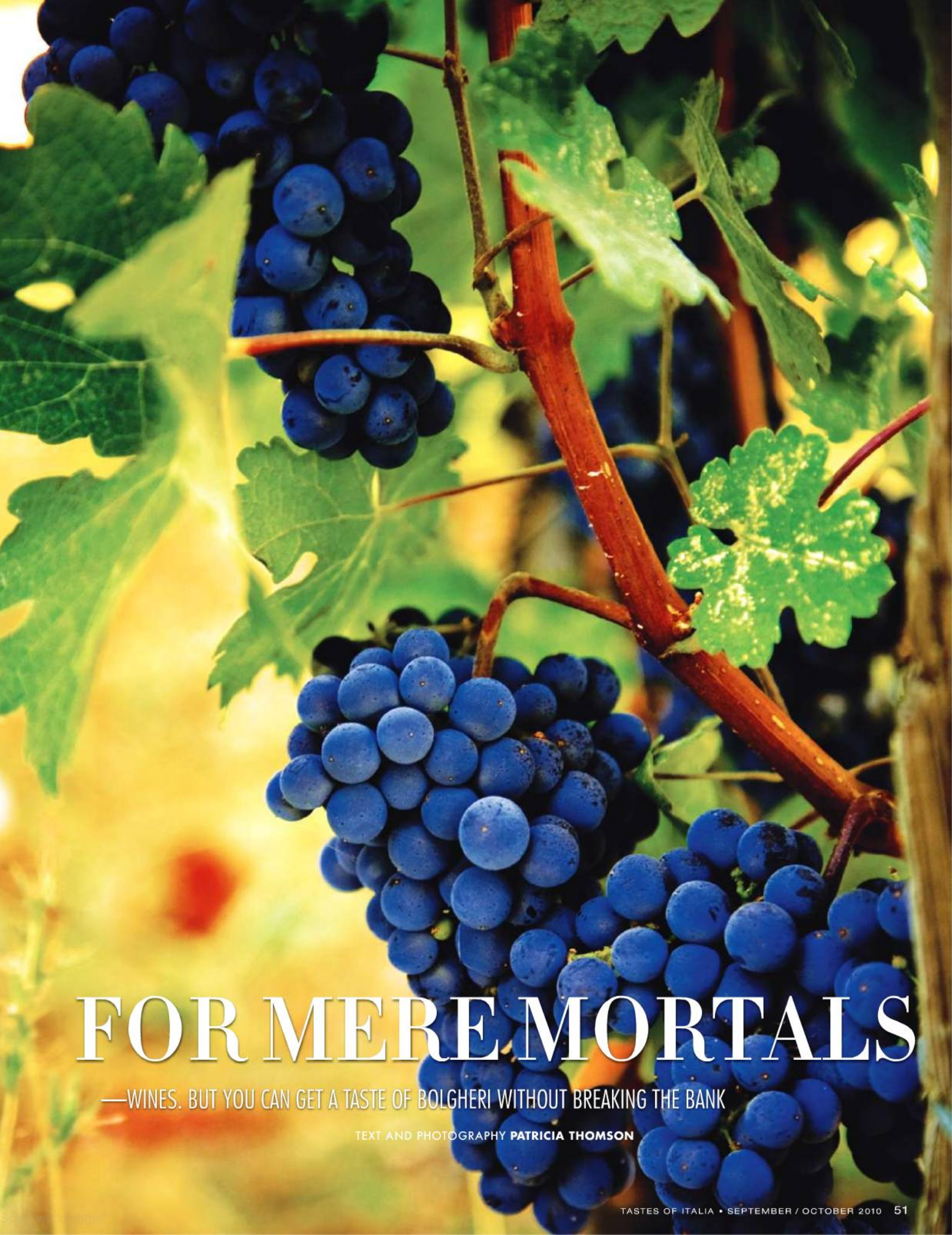


SUPER TUSCANS ARE

THE SUPER TUSCANS OF BOLGHERI ARE AMONG ITALY'S MOST PRIZED—AND PRICEY



FOR MERE MORTALS

—WINES. BUT YOU CAN GET A TASTE OF BOLGHERI WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY **PATRICIA THOMSON**

As a wine journalist and wine-tour operator, I'm pretty lucky. My professional credentials have allowed me to taste iconic wines that are well beyond my price range. I'd tried the pinnacle of Super Tuscans, wines like Sassicaia, Ornellaia, Masseto, and Grattamacco—names that inspire a certain kind of hushed awe. Oh, the praises sung! But ouch, those prices: $125 and up. Even less famous examples can easily fetch $60.

So, you might reasonably ask, what's so super about Super Tuscans? More important, where can I get some without mortgaging the house? The quick answer is this: Nowadays, there are affordable Super Tuscans made all over Tuscany. Every winemaker with a few hectares of land puts together some kind of blend that falls outside the official DOC and DOCG categories, utilizes French grapes, and adopts this nomenclature.

The rocky soil of Sassicaia is special. It's only IN THAT EXACT SPOT THAT THIS TYPE *of soil exists in Bolgheri. It came from the* WAVES OF A TORRENT EONS AGO.

But to fully experience Super Tuscans' seductive siren song, you have to go to the land of their birth: Bolgheri, a small town in the province of Livorno, in the coastal area known as the Upper Maremma. And to truly appreciate their shock value and influence, you have to travel back in time to the days when cabernet, merlot, and other *bordelaise* varietals were no more common in Italy than Dijon mustard or Brie cheese.

The story begins with Sassicaia and its creator, the Marquis Mario Incisa della Rocchetta. Born in the Piedmont town of Rocchetta, the Marquis was schooled in Pisa and by age 30 had married a Bolgheri aristocrat, Clarice della Gherardesca, whose family once lorded over coastal land from Pisa to Piombino. In the 1930s, the Maremma was a region of peaches, strawberries, swamps, and thoroughbred horse farms, not wine. Tuscans drank a light, simple sangiovese that was bottled and ready to quaff six months after harvest. The Marquis, who'd grown up with ageworthy Bordeaux favored by the Piemontese gentry, yearned for something more sturdy and enduring. After devoting his energies to horseracing in the pre-war decades, he turned his attention to wine after 1942 when the Gherardesca property was divided between two sisters. His wife inherited Tenuta San Guido and a tract of land called Sassicaia, named after the rocks, or sassi, pulled from the soil. Her sister, Carlotta, had married Nicoló Antinori, the 25th generation of a great Florentine family that had been making noteworthy wine since the 1300s. Like the royal marriages of yore, these unions laid the groundwork for a powerful synergy.

Nicoló Antinori began making a rosé after settling into the Gherardescas' Gualdo al Tasso estate in Bolgheri. Marketed with billboards along the Aurelia Way, the ancient Roman road that runs along the Tyrrhenian coast, this rosé became Bolgheri's first commercially successful wine. (Its modern incarnation, Scalabrone Rosato, is a delicious, savory blend of sangiovese, cabernet, and syrah, originally devised by famed enologist Giacomo Tachis, who was hired early on by Antinori.)

Meanwhile, Incisa della Rocchetta took a different, unblazed path. He decided to make an Italian cabernet. He'd first tasted cab during his childhood in Rocchetta Tanaro, and cabernet was the grape his great-grandfather Leopoldo had recommended as "the most reliable" in his 1869 catalog of 376 grape varietals. (Such agricultural inventories were common after 1866, when the newly created Kingdom of Italy's Ministry of Agriculture launched a commission to study and improve management of the country's poor farming practices.) What's more, the gravely soil on the Marquis's properties reminded him of the soil in Graves, Bordeaux, another alluvial region close to the sea.

The Marquis planted his first thousand cuttings not in Sassicaia, but up in the hills where he'd hid from SS roundups during the war. Called Castiglioncello, this plot of land was surrounded by virgin woods and was high enough to catch the cool sea breezes, which provided a freshness and temperature excursion well suited for grapes. But when his workers tasted the wine that March—the standard waiting period among peasant-farmers to judge a new vintage—they pronounced it undrinkable. *"Porcaio,"* a mess fit for pigs. Disillusioned, the Marquis set aside his project. But when he tasted the cabernet some years later after the tannins had mellowed, it was a different wine entirely. The butterfly had emerged, and it was resplendent. Italy's most prominent wine critic of the time, Luigi Veronelli, gave it a hearty endorsement. Encouraged, the Marquis expanded his vineyards, planting in Sassicaia and another plot nearby. He modernized his cellar and started aging the wine in French oak barriques at the suggestion of his nephew, a recent enology graduate—much like the Bordeaux the Marquis so loved. In 1968, Sassicaia, the first Super Tuscan, was commercially launched.

The premise of Sassicaia—an Italian wine using French varietals, nurtured in barrique, and intended for long aging—was revolutionary. Its ripple effect spread across the peninsula and endures to this day.

But back in 1968, they had a problem. The Marquis's son recognized that they had no expertise, no contacts, and no track record in wine marketing or distribution.

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SUPER TUSCANS:
Bottles of prized red wine from Bolgheri in Tuscany now command a high price; two of the workers taking part in the annual harvest; the imposing medieval entrance to Bolgheri; walled vineyards in the Tuscan countryside.

But their Antinori cousins did—a good 700 years' worth. So the families partnered up, forming a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The Antinoris took over sales, and Niccolo Incisa recruited their enologist. A master blender, Giacomo Tachis helped refine Sassicaia's cabernet sauvignon–cabernet franc mix and began overseeing their wine production. Soon Sassicaia was winning accolades worldwide.

In 1994, Bolgheri Sassicaia became a DOC—the first in Italy tied exclusively to one winery. The reason wasn't just politics; it was *terroir*. As the Marquis recognized, the rocky soil of Sassicaia was special. "It was a very strange choice," says Attilo Scienza, professor of enology at the University of Milan and one of Italy's greatest authorities on the science of the vine. "It's *only* in that exact spot that this type of soil exists in Bolgheri. It came from the waves of a torrent," deposited there during the flooding of the Mediterranean eons ago, after Africa's northward drift reopened the gates of Gibraltar. This rush of water created the hills and valleys at the foot of the Apennines and accounts for the vastly different soil types on Tuscany's coast, which range from marine sand to 100-million-year-old soil from the third geological era. The Sassicaia vineyard, says Scienza, "is rich in metals and has a degree of clay that's not present elsewhere in Bolgheri. This is important for giving wines long life."

Other wineries sprang to life and all followed the Marquis's lead, using French grapes and barrique aging. These early pioneers included Grattamacco, Michele Satta, Tua Rita, and Ornellaia, the latter founded by Nicoló Antinori's son Ludovico. His other son, Piero, created the first Super Tuscan in the Chianti Classico region (Tignanello in 1971) and more recently pushed Gualdo al Tasso into the modern age with its eponymous Super Tuscan.

This Gold Rush has continued unabated over the past decade, with winemakers and investors from all over Italy snatching up property up and down the Tuscan coast, including Piedmont's Gaja (Ca' Marcanda), Amarone producer Allegrini (Poggio al Tesoro), and Chianti's Castello di Fonterutoli (Belguardo), among other wine stars.

The result is a bounty of riches in wine—at least for the rich. But happily, budget-minded buyers can enjoy the goods too. With some strategic shopping, great Bolgheri reds can be found at reasonable prices.

Tip #1: Look for second-tier wines from marquee names. Virtually all the top wineries now have one or two labels made from "lesser" vineyards (that is, with younger vines or in less advantageous positions) or from grapes that don't undergo quite the same rigorous selection at harvest. Since it's the same winemakers who craft these wines —with the same skill and pride—the standards are high. At the entry level, there's **Le Difese** ($25) from Tenuta San Guido, **Il Bruciato** ($22) from Gualdo al Tasso, and **Le Volte** ($23) from Ornellaia. Like most classic Bolgheri reds, they contain a dose of cabernet—in this case, 70 percent, 50 percent, and 10 percent respectively, while the balance is sangiovese for Le Difese, merlot and syrah for Il Bruciato (which has Bolgheri's prettiest label, picturing the ubiquitous umbrella pines), and sangiovese plus merlot for Le Volte.

Splurge a bit more, and you'll take a great leap forward: **Guidalberto** ($45), the second label to Sassicaia, and **Le Serre Nuove dell' Ornellaia** ($55) usher you into the realm of dark plush fruit that gets its ripeness from the Tuscan sun. Both have a classy elegance that's characteristic of the best coastal Super Tuscans. Like their top-tier brethren, these polished wines don't overreach or aim for ultra-extraction. They are, after all, Italian, which means they're made for food. (And nothing tires the palate like an over-extracted, high alcohol fruit bomb.)

Tip #2: Look just outside the Bolgheri DOC zone. These wines will be labeled under the broader category "Toscana IGT." Ludovico Antinori recently created Tenuta di Biserno in Bibbona, just north of the DOC border, and its entry-level **Insoglio**

WINE VALUE:
Il Bruciato wine from Gualdo al Tasso is an entry-level wine that's a blend of cabernet, merlot and syrah. At $22, it's a good buy for a Bolgheri wine.

del Cinghiale ($24) is truly superb. Perhaps it's the presence of dark, briary syrah in that blend that strikes my fancy, since I also adore Il Bruciato, another blend containing syrah. **Lagone** ($15) from the Aia Vecchia winery is also a good buy from the area between Bolgheri and Bibbona. Perhaps the best deal among coastal Super Tuscans is **Monte Antico Rosso** ($10). Found in wine shops everywhere in the U.S., this is a proprietary label created for wine importer Neil Empson, which comes from an area about 25 miles north of Bolgheri, in the province of Pisa.

Tip #3: Try the following list. This selected line-up includes other good, well-priced coastal Super Tuscans that I've encountered at professional tastings, through wine shop recommendations, and at the wineries themselves. Consider it a shortcut to a great wine adventure:

- **Rosso dei Notri,** Tua Rita ($25)
- **Amore**, I Greppi ($23)
- **Mediterra**, Poggio al Tesoro ($23)
- **Poggio alle Querce**, Il Guado ($22)
- **Cabernet-Syrah,** Fortediga ($18)

While working your way through the list, keep the words of one winemaker in mind: "The soil is similar to Bordeaux, but the sun is ours—a Tuscan sun." That brings us to a nice, concise definition of Super Tuscans: French grapes under a Tuscan sun. It's a handy mantra. Just drink and repeat.

Patricia Thomson is a wine journalist and president of La Dolce Vita Wine Tours.

SICILY: A LAND OF FRESH AND SPICY FLAVORS

ARAB, FRENCH AND SPANISH CUISINES ARE AMONG THE MANY INFLUENCES THAT FLAVOR THE COOKING OF SICILY, AN ISLAND OFF ITALY'S SOUTHERN COAST THAT HAS PLAYED HOST TO A VARIETY OF CULTURES. THE ARABS BROUGHT SPICES, SUGAR, AND CITRUS, WHICH ALL CONTRIBUTE TO THE FAMED SICILIAN DESSERTS.

By David Cohen

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ALTHOUGH

just off the mainland, the foods of Sicily are very distinct from their larger neighbor. While Sicily has given Italy such dishes as caponata, gelato, cannolis and veal marsala, many of the recipes prepared on the island can only be found in various distinct regions on the island.
Given its proximity to the sea, numerous fish can be caught in the surrounding waters, including cuttlefish, sardines, tuna, swordfish and anchovies. Rice is eaten infrequently, but pastas abound. The Arab influence is notable in the northwestern portion of Sicily near Trapani where cous cous, a fine grain, is very popular. Palermo has also been influenced by the Arab world where pine nuts, raisins, almonds and sesame seeds find their way into many local dishes. On the eastern half of the

island, particularly in and around Messina, salted cod and battarga (salted mullet, tuna or swordfish roe), which were handed down from the Normans in the north, are regularly eaten.

French and Spanish influences can be found throughout the island with the use of browned onions and a penchant for elaborate presentations and sauces including timbales and meat dishes wrapped in pastry. Although beef doesn't have a rich tradition in Sicily other than meatballs, game meat abounds, particularly in the south around Ragusa where wild boar, hare and wild birds abound. You will also find many recipes which utilize mutton or kid, chicken and pork.

Of course, Sicily excels in all things sweet and its confections are probably the greatest culinary contributions of this island. With respect to cheeses, three of the most well known are Pecorino Siciliano, a sharp sheep's milk cheese used for grating; caciocavallo, a pungent soft cheese prepared from cow's milk that is eaten sliced; and ricotta, a creamy cheese served fresh or dried and salted.

To get a better feel for the types of dishes eaten throughout Sicily, I'd like to describe in detail what goes into the island's most popular and unique creations. Some are regional specialties, while others can be found throughout Italy.

One of the most popular appetizers throughout Sicily is arancini, a fried rice ball which is often stuffed with peas, diced caciocavallo, and a meat sauce. In Palermo, Sicily's capital, pine nuts and raisins are added. Impanate comes from Syracusa. It's a foccacia (flat bread) filled with broccoli, sausage, fresh cheese or potatoes, onions and tomatoes. Guastedde hails from Palermo and are small soft sesame seed bread loaves stuffed with spleen, ricotta and caciocavallo--no doubt an acquired taste if you weren't brought up on it! Caponata is no doubt familiar to those who love Italian food and grew up on the Progresso version, comprised of lightly sauteed vegetables including eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, olives, capers (grown in abundance on the Aeolian Islands off the coast of Sicily), pinenuts, raisins and almonds which are sweetened with a sweet and sour sauce and served cold or at room temperature atop flat bread.

Some of the best loved first courses include cous cous in the Trapani/Marsala area – steamed semolina which is blended with a rich fish soup, stewed lamb, or a combination of fried eggplant, chicken and broccoli, a one dish meal if such a thing exists in Italy; oven baked timbale; macaroni with meat sauce, hard boiled eggs, chicken livers, ham, chicken, cheese and peas, and assorted herbs; pasta con sarde y finnochio, probably one of the most recognized Sicilian dishes, uses a sauce made from fresh sardines, anchovies, pine nuts, onions, raisins and wild fennel seeds topped with seasoned bread crumbs; and from Palermo comes "anelletti al forno," a baked pasta containing a thick meat ragout, eggplant, grated caciocavallo and fresh tuma cheese.

Fish dishes abound in Sicily and I can only touch on a few, but you could stay for at least six months in Sicily, eat fish every day and never eat the same dish twice. Fresh tuna al ragu is a classic. The fish is sprinkled with garlic, field greens and salt, browned in olive oil, finished with white wine and sauced with onions, tomato, garlic, hot peppers. It's then finished with oil, salt, oregano, breadcrumbs, sliced onion and tomato. Marlin, a stronger fish, is cut into big slices and then pan fried with tomatoes, potatoes, olives and capers. This dish is prepared more elaborately in Messina where celery, onions and fried artichokes are added. Salt cod with potatoes is very popular in and around Messina and cuttlefish served in its own ink with pasta is popular island wide.

Meat dishes tend to use the game on the island. Beccafico 'nna cipudde consists of hollowed out onions stuffed with small wild birds. Either the onions are huge or the birds are very tiny! Kid (young goat) a *sciusciareddu* is browned then finished with tomatoes, asparagus and fried artichokes and just before serving is covered with a thin layer of cheese, parsley and beaten eggs. One of the most popular rabbit preparations is done "stimparata" style. The meat is marinated in sliced onion, red wine, laurel and peppers and then cooked in a sweet and sour sauce. If you're a game fan, head to the Ragusa area in south central Sicily. Finally, there's "farsumagru," which is prepared with big slices of lean

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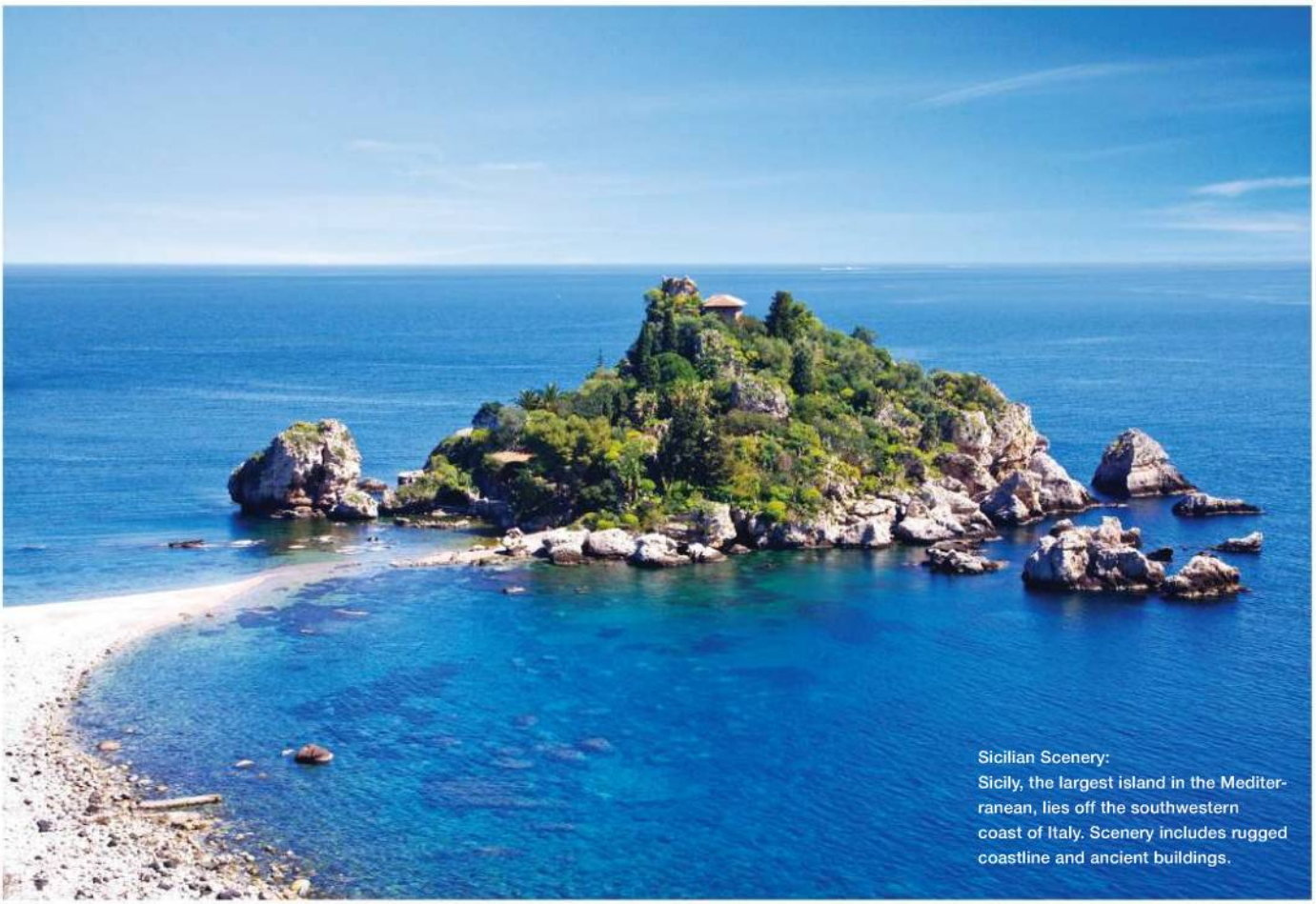

Sicilian Scenery:
Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean, lies off the southwestern coast of Italy. Scenery includes rugged coastline and ancient buildings.

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TASTES OF SICILY

Potato and Onion Gratin

- 1 pound white potatoes, cut into 1/4-inch slices
- ¼ cup olive oil, divided
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper
- ¼ cup toasted bread crumbs
- 6 or 7 black Italian olives, pitted and cut in half
- ¼ cup freshly grated Pecorino or Parmesan cheese
- Fresh chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 400°F. Drizzle half the olive oil in the bottom of a suitable baking dish, spreading to coat well. Layer half the potatoes on the bottom and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Add a layer of onions and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Repeat another layer of each. Top with remaining olive oil, bread crumbs, olives, cheese and parsley. Cover with foil and bake for 50 minutes. Remove foil and bake for an additional 12 to 15 minutes to brown the top.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Sicilian Bean Soup

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 1 celery stalk, diced
- 2 15-oz. cans cannellini beans
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 quart water
- 1 chunk rind from Parmigiano Reggiano
- ½ teaspoon dried red chile flakes
- Sea salt
- 4 to 5 cups water
- 1 cup fresh spinach, slivered
- 1 cup fresh green cabbage, slivered
- 1 cup tube pasta, like ditalini or macaroni
- Freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- Fresh parsley, chopped

In a large pot, combine olive oil, garlic, carrot, onion, celery and beans, and cook on low for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring to coat well. Add bay leaves, 1 quart water, cheese rind, red chile flakes and salt. Cover and cook about 30 minutes over low heat. Remove bay leaves. Remove half the mixture and puree. Return pureed mixture to pot on low heat, uncovered.

In a separate pot, bring 4 to 5 cups of water to a boil. Add spinach, cabbage and pasta and cook on high for 7 to 8 minutes. Remove a cup of cooking water and set aside.

Drain the pasta and vegetables and add to bean mixture. Add some reserved cooking water if mixture is too thick. Stir well and cook for 5 to 7 minutes.

Sprinkle with grated cheese and fresh parsley.

Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Sicilian Style Chicken with Spaghetti

- ½ pound spaghetti
- 2 eggs, whisked with 2 tablespoons water or milk
- 2 cups bread crumbs with 2 tablespoons flour and 1/2 teaspoon salt mixed in
- 6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size pieces
- 3 tablespoons virgin olive oil
- 1 (15 oz.) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon dried red chile flakes
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano, chopped
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- Freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Cook spaghetti according to package directions.

Prepare egg mixture in a medium bowl. In a second bowl, blend the bread crumb mixture. First, dip chicken in egg mixture (drain with slotted spoon), then dredge in bread crumb mixture. Put prepared chicken into a large skillet coated with olive oil. Brown evenly.

Add crushed tomatoes, red chile flakes, garlic, oregano and parsley. Stir to mix well. Cook on medium for 20 minutes.

To serve, mix with pasta and top with cheese.

Makes 6 servings.

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SICILIAN SUNSHINE
Sicily's abundant sunshine, beautiful coastal scenery and great food make it a favorite vacation spot.

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beef which are rolled and stuffed with hard boiled eggs, ham, cheese, bacon fat, pine nuts, raisins, sausage and spices and stewed in tomato sauce—the Sicilian version of rouladen.

Sicilian sweets, in all their splendor, begin with the most recognizable, the cannoli, hard pastry shells filled with sweetened ricotta (in the U.S. mascarpone cheese is used as well), candied fruit and chocolate sprinkles on the ends. Cassata alla Siciliana is made with sponge cake, sweetened ricotta, chocolate, vanilla, candied fruit and maraschino cherries. Also found is the highly unusual Martorana "fruits," which are made from almond paste in the shape of various fruits; cuccia - of Arabic origin- which incorporates long cooked wheat grains that are flavored with honey, creamed ricotta, chocolate and candied fruit; giuggiulena, a soft nougat made with honey, sesame seeds and almonds; and impanatiglie of Modica, a dessert ravioli filled with almonds, walnuts, minced meat, chocolate, cinnamon and cloves. Then there's always gelato. Try the nocciola, or hazelnut. For me, it's the sine qua non of gelatos.

Wines

Wine production in Sicily dates to 2000 B.C. Sicily produces 18 DOC wines, meaning the grapes are registered as having come from a particular area within a quality region. They also produce seven IGT wines such that the grapes come from a regional geographic area. DOC wines are of higher quality and the designation conveys a protected status. Most of these designated wines are vinified in the provinces of Palermo, Marsala, and Agrigento. Other wine-growing areas include Vittoria in the south and the area of Mt. Etna in the northeast. Although Sicily is most famous for its sweet wines such as Marsala, Malvasia from the Lipari Islands off the coast and Moscato from Siracusa as well as Pantelleria, there are a number of high quality dry whites and reds which bear mentioning. Whites such as pinot bianchi, alcamo (a fruity wine from Trapani), and inzoli are very popular. Cerasuolo from the south near Ragusa, Faro from Messina and Etna reds and roses made from the nerello grape are some of the better reds. Regaleali, made by Count Tasca, though not a DOC wine, is often preferred by many Sicilians to DOC wines like Etna and Faro.

Feasts

Many of the great feasts of Sicily are named after saints or have some other religious connotation. Feast of the Holy Cross Festival at Casteltermini occurs in May. The food is both distinctive and plentiful, and occurs simultaneously with the Tatarata Festival where young people dressed in white duel with iron swords--half fight, half dance. The Feast of San Paolo in Palazzolo in June lasts three days with celebrations, food, music, processionals and fireworks. The Feast of San Giacomo in Caltagirone on July 24 and 25 has a long staircase lit by thousands of multicolored candles during this two-day feast. The Cous Cous Fest at San Vito Lo Capo in September invites cooks from four continents to participate in preparing this grain-based dish, which is known as the "dish of peace."

Antiquities

For those of you into ancient history, here are four don't miss archaeological sites to visit if you're in Sicily.

The **Valle dei Templi** in Agrigento is where you will find one of the two best preserved dome temples from the 5th century B.C. This is the site of the remains of Akragas, an ancient Greek colony.

In the province of Marsala, you will find the **ancient Phoenician town of Mozia**, which has been around since the 8th century B.C. It's on the islet of San Pantaleo in the middle of a shallow lagoon. Be sure to see the city walls and gates as well as the house of mosaics and the necropolis.

Villa Romana del Casale, located 6 km from Piazza Armerina--don't miss the gorgeous floor mosaics of this ancient Roman villa which dates back to the end of the 3rd, or middle of the 4th century A.D.

Segesta in the Calatafimi area is one of the best preserved sites in all of Sicily. The two most impressive monuments are the 5th century B.C. dome temple and the 3rd century B.C. theater.

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Spaghetti with Sea Bass

- ½ pound spaghetti
- 1 to 1½ pounds fresh sea bass or other firm fleshed white fish, cut into bite-size pieces
- Salt and pepper
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 28-oz. can diced Italian tomatoes, with juices
- ½ teaspoon red chile flakes
- ½ cup black Sicilian olives, pitted and cut in half
- ¼ cup capers
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh parsley for garnish

Cook spaghetti according to package directions.

Meanwhile, season the fish with salt and pepper and set aside.

In a large skillet, combine olive oil and garlic and cook on medium for 3 minutes. Add the fish and cook for 3 minutes on one side. Turn the fish over and add the remaining ingredients, except parsley. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 3 minutes.

When pasta is cooked al dente, drain and add to the skillet, stirring to coat well. Cook on low heat until almost all of the liquid is absorbed. Garnish with parsley and serve.

Make 6 servings.

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Easy Sunday Dinner

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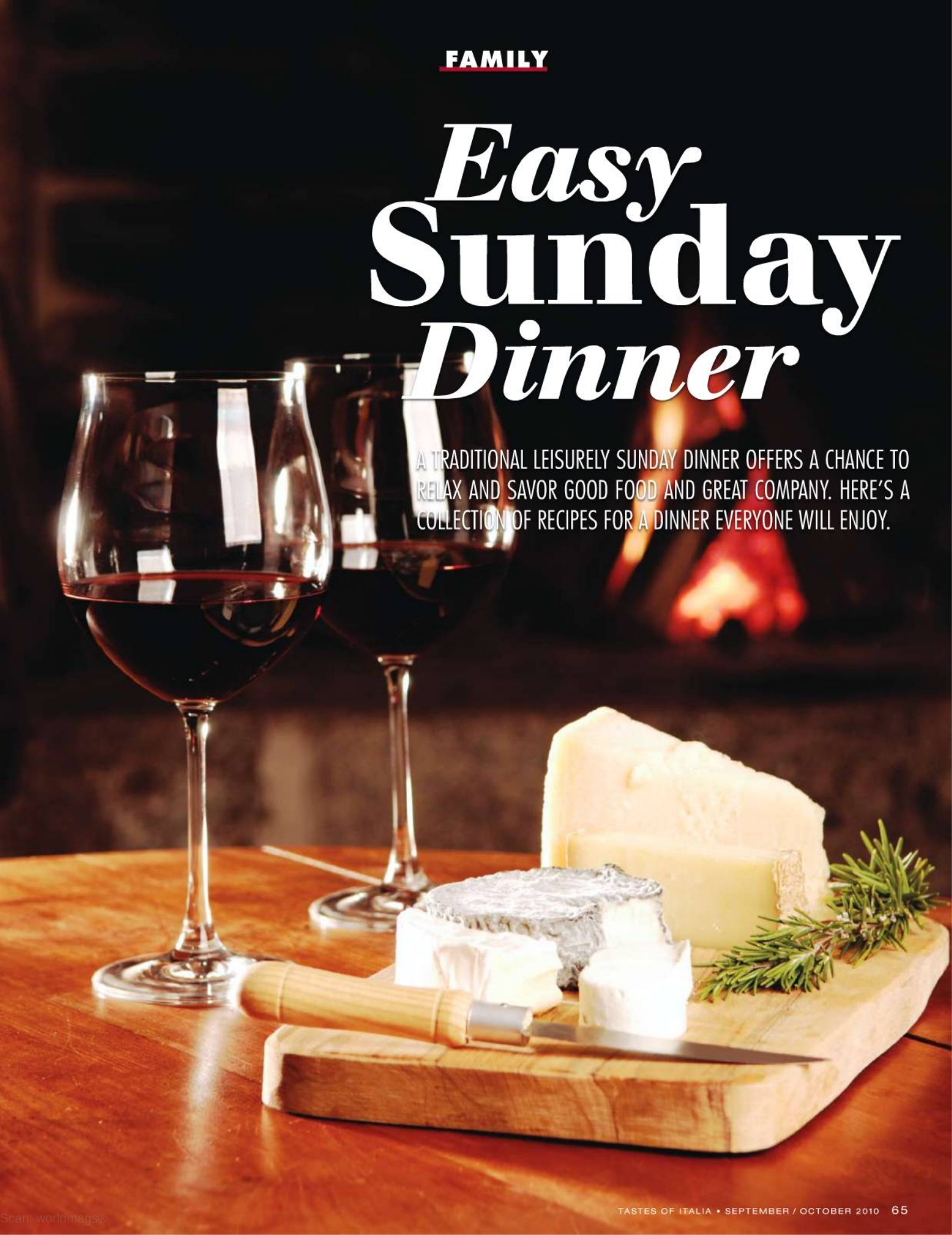

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Mixed Olives with Herbs (Olive Accondite)

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 2 cups fresh chopped celery
- 16 ounces mixed olives
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 pinch red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon fresh orange zest
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Salt to taste

In a small skillet, combine olive oil and seeds and heat on medium for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a large bowl, combine remaining ingredients. Add fennel seeds with olive oil; toss well.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Fresh Green Salad with Pine Nuts and Parmesan

- 8 ounces fresh mixed greens
- ¼ cup toasted pine nuts
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 4 ounces shredded Parmesan cheese
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

In a large bowl toss the greens and pine nuts. Add the olive oil and toss again. Add the lemon juice, cheese, salt and pepper and toss again. Serve immediately.

Makes 4 servings.

Roasted Beef Tenderloin in Chianti (Bistecca alla Chianti)

- 1 (3-4 pound) beef tenderloin, trimmed
- Sea salt to coat the beef
- Fresh ground black pepper to coat the beef
- 4 tablespoons fresh rosemary, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1½ cups Chianti wine (or other dry red wine)
- 6 tablespoons butter

Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat the meat with salt, pepper and rosemary. Place olive oil in large skillet and heat on high until almost smoking. Place beef in skillet and brown on all sides. Cover with parchment paper and place in oven for about 15 minutes or until internal temperature reaches 135°F for medium rare or desired doneness.* With a mitt or thick towel remove skillet from oven. Remove beef from skillet and set aside. Add vinegar, garlic and wine to skillet and reduce by half over medium heat. Whisk in butter until melted. Remove and cut the beef into thick slices. Spoon juice over beef and serve.

Makes 6 to 8 servings.

* You need to cook according to temperature inside beef rather than by time, because times will vary depending on thickness of beef and accuracy of your oven.

Polenta with Butter and Cheese

- 5 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup polenta
- ½ stick butter
- ½ cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese
- Salt and pepper, if desired

In a large pot combine water and salt and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and whisk in polenta. Continue stirring for about 30 minutes until thickened but still creamy. Stir in butter and cheese. Season with salt and pepper if desired and serve with roast beef tenderloin.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

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Polenta and Roast Beef

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Apple Pie with Pecan Streusel Topping

Crust:

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 4 tablespoons whole milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 tablespoon melted butter

Filling:

- ½ cup light brown sugar
- ¼ cup white sugar
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ cup apple juice
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 7 Golden Delicious apples, peeled and sliced

Topping:

- ½ cup chopped pecans
- ⅓ cup light brown sugar
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened to room temperature

Preheat oven to 400°F. To make the crust, combine flour, salt and sugar in a large bowl and mix well. In a smaller bowl, combine the oil, milk, vanilla and butter, then add to the flour mixture, mixing with a fork until mixture is crumbly. Form mixture into a loose ball. Place onto a 9-inch pie pan that has been sprayed with nonfat cooking spray. Pat crust into pie dish until all sides and bottom are covered. Combine filling ingredients and place filling in the crust. Bake pie for 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, mix topping ingredients and set aside.

Remove pie from oven at 25 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°F, add topping and return pie to oven. Bake for 25 minutes more.

Remove pie from oven and let cool for about 1 hour before serving.

Makes 8 servings.

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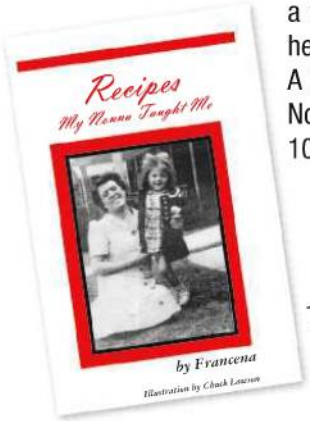

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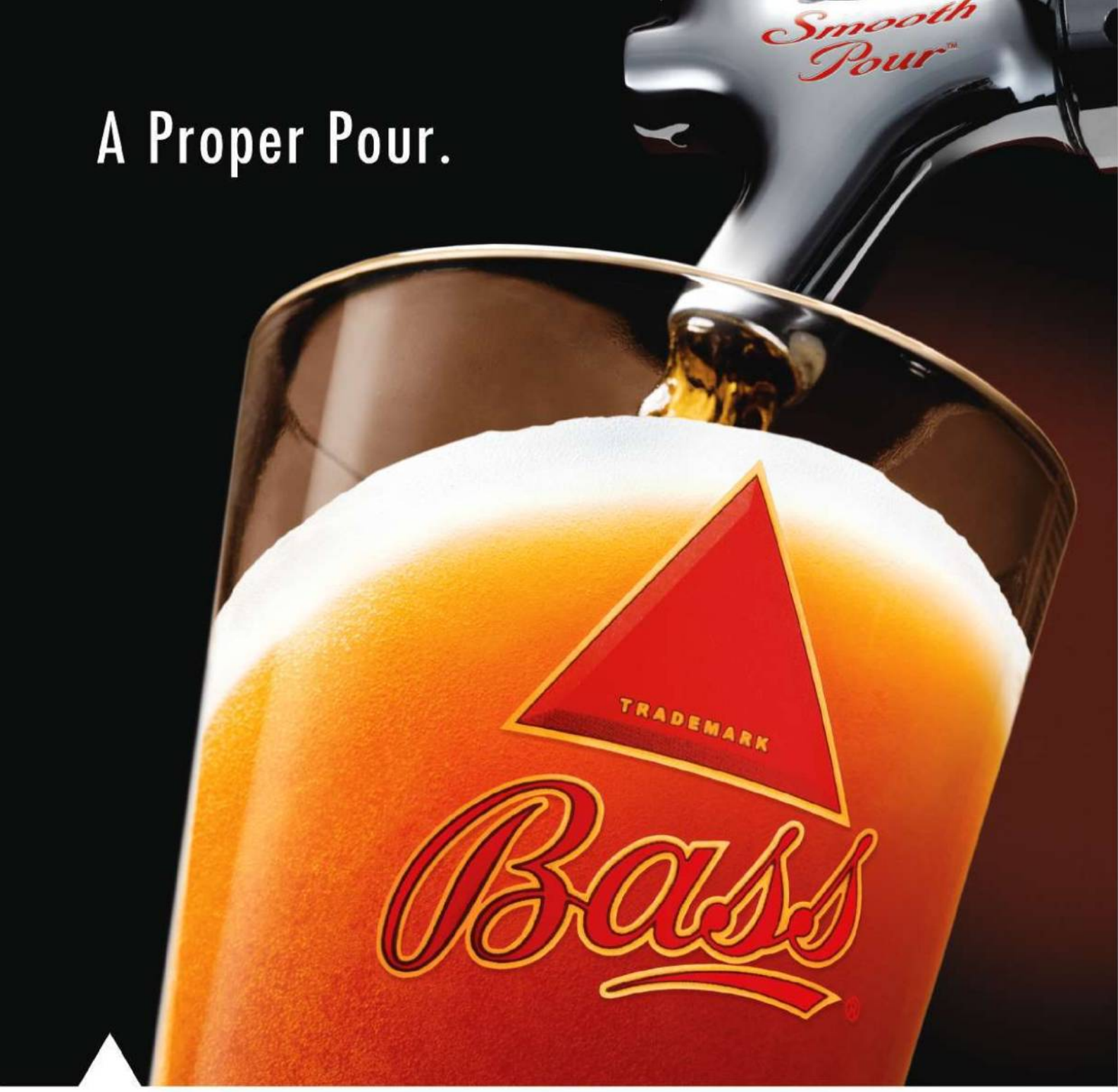

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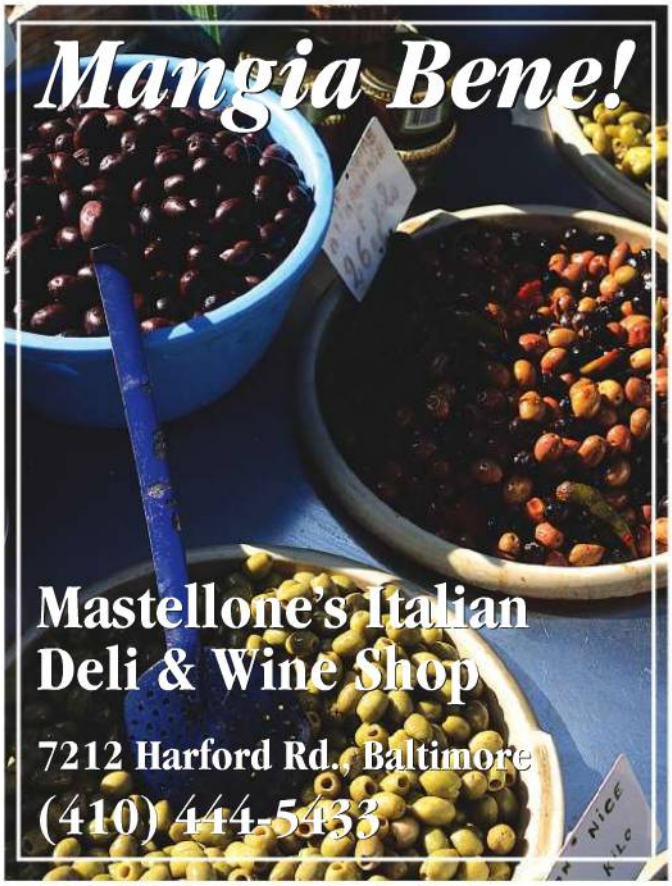

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Vol. 10 No. 5 TASTES OF ITALIA (ISSN 1539-4743) is published bi-monthly by Sunwest Publishing, 3769 Tibbetts Avenue, Suite A, Riverside, CA 92506; (951) 682-3026. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Tastes of Italia, 3769 Tibbetts Avenue, Suite A, Riverside, CA 92506. Periodicals postage paid at Riverside, CA and additional mailing offices. Subscriptions, 6 issues for $24.95.

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Golden Goodness

Italians know pumpkin is not just for pie—try this sweet and sour recipe instead

TEXT **MARY ANN ESPOSITO** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN MICHAEL LAURENCE**

In Italy, pumpkin, or *zucca*, is used as a filling for ravioli, to make gnocchi, baked into bread, and pureed for soup. In Sicily, pumpkin is marinated and served as an antipasto. The beautiful orange color of this dish, mingled with dark green basil leaves and flecks of refreshing mint, reminds one of a beautiful fall day in New England. I use butternut squash because the taste approximates the sweet pumpkins of Sicily. If you use pumpkin, be sure to buy a small sugar pumpkin; a big jack-o-lantern doesn't have any flavor.

Sweet and Sour Yellow Pumpkin

- 1 pound sugar pumpkin or butternut squash
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- 3 fresh basil leaves, torn into pieces
- 4 fresh mint leaves, minced
- ⅓ to ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large clove garlic, cut in half
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Cut the stem off and peel the pumpkin or squash. Cut the pumpkin or squash in half, remove the seeds and stringy pulp, and discard. Cut flesh into strips. Set aside.

In a 9-x-12-inch glass dish, mix the vinegar and sugar until the sugar dissolves. Add the basil and mint, mix, and set aside.

In a skillet, heat the olive oil, add the garlic, and press it into the oil with the back of a wooden spoon. Remove the garlic when it starts to turn color and discard it. Fry the pumpkin or squash pieces in batches for about 10 to 12 minutes, or until they soften and start to look glazed and brown.

Remove the strips from the skillet and add them to the vinegar mixture. Add salt and pepper, and stir to mix well. Cover the dish and marinate at room temperature for 3 to 4 hours before serving. Or refrigerate and serve the next day at room temperature.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

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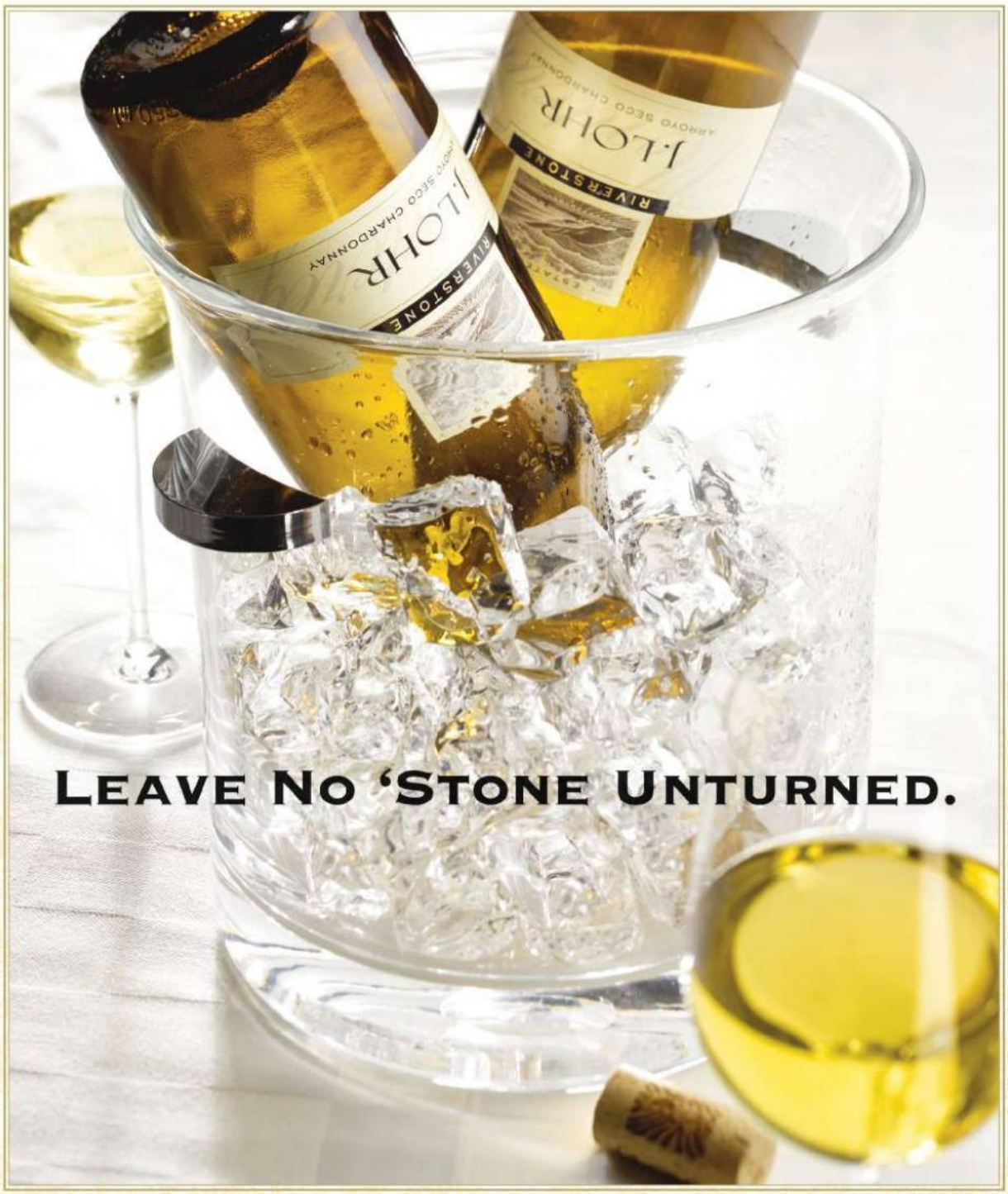

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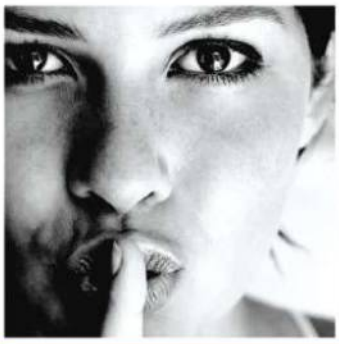

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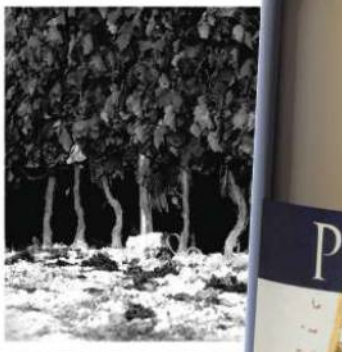

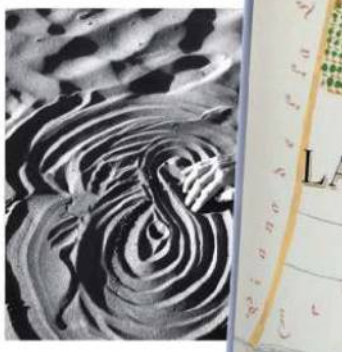

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